

THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF SPORT MEGA-EVENTS



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The Cultural Politics of Sport Mega-Events

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The cultural politics of sport mega-events

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2024 has been the year of the XXXIII Summer Olympic Games. The Paris Games have catalysed the attention of millions of people all over the world, aroused mixed feelings, and triggered transformations whose effects could be fully grasped in the coming years. To coincide with the Olympic year, Eracle is pleased to dedicate the volume 7(1) to sports mega-events.

The scholarly investigation of sport mega-events constitutes an articulated field of inquiry with solid roots in the international debate. Over the last two decades, since Roche's early explorations (2000; 2003) (see also: Black, 2014; Guala, 2015), much effort has been given to distinguish, in the configuration of "modern society's great *shows*" (Lee Ludvigsen, Rowkood & Parnell, 2022, p. 705), organizational models and contents that are diverse and variegated – i.e., small / large / mega events, sporting / commercial / recreational events. It is not surprising that increasing attention is paid to sport events. According to Roche (2017), sport mega-events, as global mediatized spectacles, have steadily replaced other forms of the "mega" – such as the Expos – even though these continue to be arranged and attract visitors.

In addition, it is perhaps in the context of sport that experimentation and variations on the forms of the events and their organizing processes are at play. By analysing the English Premier League as a social phenomenon, Giulianotti (2011) has introduced the concept of "large-diffuse" sport events to specify that, nowadays, event *time* tends to be *diluted*, and *space deconcentrated*. Even the football World Cup, usually hosted by a single nation – the only exception being the 2002 edition in South Korea and Japan – seems to be moving towards a logic of co-organization which involves several countries: Canada, Mexico and the United States will host the World Cup in 2026; Morocco, Portugal and Spain – with three matches in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay – will host the World Cup in 2030.

Beyond the classificatory interest, and its relevance to grasp a phenomenology capable of giving us a better understanding of the society where we live in, sport mega-events allow to shine a light

into the transformation of “territories”, in a constant tension between the local and the global. As the essays in this volume exemplify, the topic can be addressed from a variety of analytical gazes and interpretive perspectives, as well as considering specific case studies – despite the Olympics and the football World Cup largely remaining the main empirical foci.

First of all, talking about territory refers to the issue of governance and its scales: different actors which, at different levels, are involved, excluded, delimited in the dynamics of governing spaces and populations. Mega-events are fully part of the “soft-power” (Nye, 2021) – to quote an established concept that recurs in the following papers – strategies of the ruling elites conceived for ensuring economic development and achieving political prestige. In the contemporary soft-power diagram, research on mega-events has well highlighted the weight of stakeholders not always driven by public interests as they do not belong to the State structures. Because of the complexity of the soft-power workings, the outcomes of the mega-events can be critical for the growth and welfare prospects of the venues, as in the case of the 2004 Greek Olympics that contributed to the default of the country in the immediately following years (Bustad, 2021). The political elites of countries bidding to host sporting events need to negotiate with international federations and require massive sponsorships that are deployed by corporations and major media players. In recent years, the international sport governing bodies have hence assumed a major role in power relations, even beyond the specific sports world (Wloch, 2013). More precisely, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) increasingly act as a collector of huge economic-financial interests and impact on the characteristics of territories according to a dynamic of “delocalisation of the local” (*one fits all*) that fosters a convergence – and often a normalisation – of culturally, spatially and socially different contexts.

Moreover, the meaning of “mega” has also to do with the symbolic value of the sport events. Indeed, they reverberate to an extremely important extent on the narratives that surround and (re)define territories, their representations, boundaries and connections. It is well known that sport, in everyday life, is a sphere of production and reproduction of cultures (Bausinger, 2008). Within the contemporary global mediatized culture, sport mega-events magnify this anthropological function (Horne, 2022). For instance, the ceremonies of the major international competitions are civil liturgies of enormous cultural value for communities. In particular, the opening of the Olympics celebrates the participating countries, and the host nation (re)constructs its collective memory and identity (see: MacAloon, 2006). The Games receive media coverage throughout their duration. All their aspects are subject to media scrutiny and become part of collective imagination. By narrating the technical deeds and the sportified bodies, an overproduction of social categories, discriminations and stigmas – especially related to gender, ethnicity / nationality, (dis)ability – takes place; a process which is being magnified by new social media currently.

The stakes of competitions go far beyond the sport records. Mega-events can thus provide a platform for expressing contrasting worldviews. Athletes are aware of the power of the media, as well as of the mega-events visibility. Throughout modernity, (fe)male athletes have tried in many ways to convey specific messages, denouncing the authoritarian politics of the organizing states in some cases, or becoming spokespersons for the collective movements present in society in some others. The glaring example is provided by the Black Olympic activism in the United

States for the civil rights of the Afro-American population, symbolised by the raised fists of Tommie Smith and John Carlos on the podium in Mexico City 1968 (Hartman, 2003).

More recently, LGBT campaigns in opposition to the Russian regime's homophobic ideology which began in 2013 – when Russia passed a law whose aim was to ban the “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations” – and lasted throughout the course of the 2014 Sochi Games, have been of great media impact (Davidson, McDonald, 2017). In the opening ceremony of Paris 2024, the Algerian delegation threw a bouquet of flowers in the Seine River to commemorate the martyrs of the independence war. The gesture aimed to raise public attention on the crimes committed by Maurice Papon's French police. On October 16, 1961, during a demonstration organized by the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), more than 11,000 civilians were arrested and moved to the *Palais des Sports* and the *Pierre de Coubertin stadium*. Several Algerians were killed. The number of the victims remains unspecified to this day.

Concerning the “contentious politics” (Tilly, Tarrow, 2015), alongside the commitment of the athletes, mega-events are characterized by their magnitude in attracting civil society opposition. Significant, to address this topic, are the reflections of Cottrell and Nelson (2010), who emphasise the Olympic Games as favourable contexts for the activation of specific networks of actors and the deployment of specific repertoires of collective action, but also marked by a series of responses that follow recurring path throughout history. In this vein, Giulianotti and Armstrong (2015), as well Boykoff (2011; 2014; 2017; 2020), provide interesting insights for examining social movements against sport mega-events. Focusing on the opposition to London 2012 and the critique about the legacy of territorial transformation, Bykoff and Fussey (2014) identify a particular dynamic that exists between activism and repression at the Olympics. Under certain conditions, such a dynamic can lead to terrorist escalations, as it happened in Munich 1972 following the kidnapping of Israeli athletes by the Palestinian Black September Organization (for a more in-depth discussion on Olympic terrorism, see: Spaaij, 2016).

The prevention of terrorism, together with the security measures introduced to limit the city access – also in the light of recent events with France as the target of international terroristic organizations – have been widely discussed on the media concerning the Paris Games. Speaking of Paris 2024, another narrative of relevance is that of “sustainability”. Public authorities have celebrated Paris as the most “inclusive” Olympics of the history, even from the perspective of environmental protection and rights.

Considering how contemporary public discourse is developing, the representation of sustainability is becoming a key aspect in the framing process of the mega-events, which seems to be necessary – for the stakeholders – for building consensus about the hosting of sport mega-events. On the other hand, forms of opposition draw, more often, on a critique of the instrumental use of the sustainability narrative adopted by the public authorities and the large investors. As the report “Playing against the clock” (Goldblatt, 2020) points out, sports organizations, in particular all those that are involved in mega-events, should receive more attention from the public in order to induce them to act with respect to the sustainability of competitive events, carefully considering the environmental impact of the infrastructures and their territorial legacy. The critique against the instrumental use of sustainability by the elites is summed up by the term “sportswashing”, which is gaining traction in popular culture and which one of the papers included in this volume attempts to address.

The essays in this volume

The research agenda on sport mega-events is broad and expanding. Here, we have introduced a few established strands of inquiry to better position the following essays and guide the reading. Every paper presents an original research article that explores, through a case study, a set of topics and issues revolving around specific areas of (empirical) analysis and (theoretical) reflection.

Infrastructures of soft power

The first three articles of the volume reflect on the strategic relationship between mega-events and the territory at various levels. *The spatial dimension of the Winter Olympic Village* focuses on the local scale. The assumption is that the sport mega-events produce the urban space and modify it. The case of the Winter Olympics Villages shows the growing capacity of the events to involve different “territorialities”, develop widespread projects and pave the way for structural / long-lasting transformations. The systematic nature of the transformations discussed by the author, who apply a “geo-historical” perspective to approach the Winter Olympic Villages projects, can be identified in the shift from reception facilities conceived to host occasional entertainment and populations to stable infrastructure designed as a driver for economic development. The focus on the Turin Olympic Village provides a seminal case study to bear an interpretive hypothesis capable of accounting a process at work in contemporary mega-events. The proposal is extremely timely given the upcoming Winter Olympic Games “Milano Cortina 2026” and, above everything, the controversial Winter Olympic Village of Milan, that is, an urban regeneration project involving multiple stakeholders that is conceived by the public and private actors for the economic and social renewal of a huge area of the city.

The paper *Des stades, des Lions Indomptables et des liturgies politiques à la CAN Total Energies Cameroon 2021* focuses on a national scale. The politics of sport mega-events is multi-faceted. The Africa Cup of Nations hosted by Cameroon in 2021 is analysed by the author in its complexity with particular attention to its political implications. Through the liturgy of the event, on the one hand, and the spatialisation of the infrastructure, on the other hand, specific images of the country are provided. The Africa Cup of Nations allows to define a coherent image of the nation, and to define the strategies of the Cameroonian political personnel, creating a specific narrative of Cameroon in comparison to other African countries, but also in comparison to European or Chinese financiers.

Azerbaijan's Sports Diplomacy and Relations with the European Union addresses the issue of sports relations, focusing on the international scale. This paper helps to shed light on an understudied geographic context, providing several insights about the rationality of sports mega-events. In the case of Azerbaijan, the choice of participating in the game of hosting major sport events and investing in new sport stadia and buildings is adopted by the political establishment to gain importance in the chessboard of international relations with Western countries, particularly the EU. According to a soft power perspective, which is being adopted by the author, building sports

infrastructure and mobilizing relations related to the sports field produces relevant effects in international diplomacy, both enhancing the state's reputation as a country that is following the path of modernization in the eyes of international political and economic actors, and obtaining results in terms of internal (geo)politics.

Narratives of modernity

The following articles explore the sport mega-events as a means to spread some sort of “modernity *Zeitgeist*”. *Cuerpos en pantallas* investigates the interplay between two (modern) cultural products: the documentary film and the Olympic Games, whose contemporary origins are identified and deepened. The author compares Leni Riefenstahl's documentary on the 1936 Berlin Games with Kon Ichikawa's documentary on the 1964 Tokyo Games. The analysis of content and formal aspects reveals correspondences and divergences between the two movies. Despite the common adherence to the narrative codes of modernity, the representations of the sporting bodies reveal the different temporal and social location of the Olympic Games, and, together with it, it is revealed a dissimilar set of aspirations, beliefs, expectations, fears and worldviews, even though both cultural products are affected by a common nationalistic undertone.

The coach in a sport mega-event deals with the sport mega-event as a space-time where the collective imaginary related to a highly symbolic figure in Brazil, such as the coach of the national football team, is redefined. Examining the chronicle of the Brazilian team's performance in the 2014 World Cup provided by the leading national newspaper, “O Globo”, the article focuses on the narrative of Felipe Scolari. Here, the *Seleção's* journey overlaps with the coach's journey. They both experienced a “miserable” conclusion in the 7-1 loss in the semi-final against Germany, the winning team of the tournament. In addition to recalling the drama of the defeat, the authors emphasise how a personalisation of collective events unfolds. In the media representations of the matches, the national team manager embodies “shameful” values and images, since they are misaligned with the ideals of efficiency, performativity and instrumental rationality. The newspaper suggests that these values – as they represent the culture of neoliberalism – should instead be introduced in (and embraced by) the Brazilian context thanks to football which is still one of the genuine expressions of popular culture, although it is influenced by processes of financialization and commodification as it occurs in several contemporary Western (neoliberal) contexts.

A device of cultural change

Sticking with the analysis of social representations, the following three articles deconstruct, from a critical angle, the mega-event as a device of cultural transformation. *Marta versus Neymar* reflects on the topic of “the war of sexes” in sport, considering the contrast between two celebrities in Brazil, the male footballer Neymar da Silva Santos Júnior and the female footballer Marta Vieira da Silva. In the comparison between the narratives of “O Globo” and “Folha de São Paulo” that appeared during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, the authors convey the contrast, emerging in the

country at that time, between conservative instances and the battles against gender discrimination. In this way, the paper addresses the political contrast between Bolsonaroist conservatism (Neymar) and social and reformist political options (Marta). Above everything, considering the “football-ification of politics” (Demuru, 2021) process that Brazil is experiencing, the “war of sexes” offers the opportunity to dig into the growing discontent of the population with regard to sport mega-events – the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics precisely – because of the economic trouble and social inequalities caused by the hosting of the events, and made particularly acute following the expenses imposed on Brazil by FIFA and the ICO.

Qatar 2022 and sportswashing discusses the way in which the countries hosting mega-events strive to celebrate their public image, while systematically silencing the enormous critical issues that these events raise, that is, the issues of environment degradation and human rights violations. Focusing on the latter, the authors analyse the role of sports journalism in supporting the washing processes that take place globally with the support of international governing bodies. The article considers Qatar 2022 – one of the most contested World Cup editions (see also: Issekin, 2023) – and examines the Italian sports press. In addition to describe the main narratives proposed by national media, which have discussed too little the controversial aspects of the mega-event, the article proposes a framework on sportswashing whose main merit is to explain the (journalistic) discursive practices by taking into account the system of power relations both within and outside the corporate sports journalism field. This attempt is summarized in the original notion, proposed by the authors, of “the sport-media-politics triangle” that could be inspiring for future inquiries. *Towards the amplification of children’s rights within Olympic discourses* breaks the ground for a rather novel reflection, not only for the journal itself. If – as the previous articles also testify – the links between sport mega-events and the politics of rights on labour, gender, “race” and sexuality have been commonly addressed, the analysis in relation to children remains underexplored. As the author of the paper explains from a human rights perspective, children can experience several forms of exploitation in the organization of the Olympics. They can suffer the consequences of the displacement that often accompanies major events and produces outcomes in terms of homelessness, imprisonment, as well as execution in the worst-case scenario. This seems to be due to the framework of the securitisation policies associated with the sites where major events are held. At the end of the text, the contribution calls for the need to pay special attention to these aspects, making the sport institutions and the organizing committees responsible for the condition of the young generations. In conclusion, the issue of sport mega-events as an engine of normalisation and hegemony is forcefully raised. Even for ethical reasons, as the author suggests, several dynamics regarding the organization and the multiple effects of the mega-events need to be continuously investigated.

We are delighted to publish such a variety of essays. They are written in English, Italian, French and Spanish. The authors have different backgrounds, and they experience specific academic trajectories. We mention these aspects to underline the transdisciplinary vocation of the journal and its cosmopolitan and anti-colonial posture. Open confrontation between scholars led as much on the absence of any intellectual impositions as on the rejection of scientific benefits

based on the personal academic position constitutes a cornerstone for Eracle. Given the richness of the contents and of the perspectives proposed by the articles, we hope that this volume can offer new insights into the cultural politics of sport mega-events.

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The spatial dimension of the Winter Olympic Village: between local model and regionalisation strategies

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Abstract

Since the second half of the 20th century, the editions of the Winter Olympic Games have catalysed different urban transformations, allowing the development of a new critical perspective on the spatial dimension of the Olympic event. The following contribution observes the various strategies by analysing the spatial models of Olympic villages developed to date. Through observing the relationships between the Olympic Village and the urban fabric, valuable tools will be advanced for evaluating the Olympic event in the context of the territory. Spatial models show the spatial dimension of the Olympic Village in the territory, allowing us to consider Olympic urbanism as a tangible asset that may fade away in the post-Olympic period. Since the first Winter Olympic Games were held in Chamonix in 1924, the event has been organised in mountain locations with ski resorts, ice rinks and accommodation facilities. The contribution analyses how creating new facilities implies the implementation of new spatial strategies capable of catalysing new territorial connections. The research proposes an innovative analysis of Olympic town planning in general and Olympic villages in particular, consolidating the field of study and offering a valuable document for the future construction of new Olympic villages in the coming decades. In addition, the study aims to reflect on the case of Turin in 2006 to observe how the regional spatial model has become a privileged case study for future candidate cities. Therefore, through the analysis, it will be observed how the winter edition, over time, has become of primary importance for implementing regional strategies in the host cities. From 2006 onwards, the Olympic event will be a primary element in planning regional infrastructure, transport systems, services and accommodation in the regional space.

Keywords: Olympic Games, Olympic Village, Legacy, Urbanism, Regionalisation.

1. Introduction

The primary element of this contribution analyses how the urbanisation of the Western world during the 20th century can be entirely understood through the consideration of relevant urban events. The Great Expos and the Olympic Games are two clear examples of this type of urban mega-event (Roche, 2000). Within Olympic urbanism, Olympic villages – temporally designed for athletes and subsequently occupied by residents in the post-Olympic period – stand out as urban artefacts that allow a deeper understanding of the relationship between architecture and urban planning. In the Olympic Village, architecture is placed at the service of creating the international imagination of the host city. In this sense, building typologies, formal languages and urban design are part of an urban landscape specifically conceived to highlight certain site-specific modernities and values (della Sala, 2022b).

At the same time, the architecture of the Olympic accommodation shows elements of reproduction within a small and limited space. Urban models and proposals, in observance of their rigidity, cannot reproduce within the host city's actual space. As noted in the final dossier of Los Angeles 1932, the architectural style of the Olympic Villages restores a miniature world, a spectacular temporal image of the city devoid of deformations, deficiencies and excesses of real urban space. Gradually, with the advancement of architecture's role in urban planning and the design of urban expansion programmes observed during the 20th century, the Olympic Villages ceased to be ephemeral constructions. During the first half of the 20th century, we observed barracks, military camps, and hotel accommodations that gave way to entirely new constructions, conceived from the outset as a central part of the city's expansion process on the subject territory. As some Olympic experiences show, the urban transformation resulting from the organisation of the Games can be used as a guideline for the city's future development (Essex & Chalkley, 1998; 2004). Cities such as Barcelona radically changed their urban profile when hosting the Games, but also used this experience of urban regeneration to design strategic and planning visions for the future (della Sala, 2022a).

Therefore, observing the different urban planning experiences of host cities during the 20th and 21st centuries allows us to advance the hypothesis of the evolution from mountain resorts to specific and complex urban planning models. The endpoint of this process would be the proposal of metropolitan and regional strategies through the evolution of the 'Olympic Village', progressively built according to criteria similar to those of the Summer Games (della Sala, 2023b). Based on recent experiences, the contemporary model combines different places within a complex network: on the one hand, the mountain resort areas and, on the other hand, the metropolitan city, as an expression of the global phenomenon.

2. The different stages of the development of the Winter Village on the regional territory

Analysing the Olympic Villages within the transformations of the Olympic cities can help observe the evolution and sensitivity of the housing issue in large contemporary metropolises. Olympic City has become a more complex geographical concept that must meet new requirements regarding air quality, water reuse, waste collection, public spaces, and well-being. Therefore, Olympic cities must be seen as an open and dynamic space to reinterpret and implement new

sustainable development theories for our communities' future. The Olympic Village has no blueprint or model. However, some models will be a reference for the Olympic urbanisation of future candidates and host cities. Therefore, in the following section, we will see which models were used to implement the Olympic Village in the host cities of the winter edition.

Phase 1: Promotion of mountain tourism in resorts (1924-1948)

Since the first edition in Chamonix in 1924, the winter event has been planned in mountain areas with ski resorts, an ice stadium and accommodation facilities. As we can see in Table 1, the winter edition up to Oslo 1952 was planned in places with a tourist vocation to implement winter sports strategies. The mountain areas the organisers chose were equipped with extensive accommodation facilities or within a winter tourism development strategy. In terms of development, Oslo in 1952 was considered the first winter city to provide a permanent Olympic village (Delorme, 2014).

Phase 2: Development of a public housing policy (1952-1964)

The second phase began with the great Oslo project of 1951. The programme envisaged a polycentric spatial organisation involving the construction of three Olympic quarters within the urban fabric of the Norwegian lagoon. Thus, from this historic moment, the Winter Olympic accommodation became a spatial transformation model similar to that observed in the summer edition. The accommodations were planned in three city areas and embedded within a strategic plan for the metropolis (Illa, Sogn and Ulleval). From the first implementation, the Olympic quarters were intended to be transformed into new residential accommodations in the post-event phase. In addition, the districts were equipped with major primary and secondary services. The buildings were arranged in 18 blocks ranging in height from 2 to 8 storeys (COJO, 1952).

During this period, a growing interest in promoting winter sports was observed. Therefore, the host cities should include the winter event in their urban transformations.¹ Subsequently, Innsbruck's 1964 edition will propose a housing development in an area defined in advance within the central government's development plan. The village was planned to be built with four 10-storey blocks (COJO, 1964). The huge neighbourhood was built to become a large residential area in the post-event phase. Finally, in this phase, we observe an exponential increase in public funding for residential housing stimulated by the Olympic event.

Phase 3: Mixed Housing in a Regional Development Dimension (1968-1988)

The third phase is characterised by the host cities' increase in size and interest in winter sports. Hence, the new spatial model will expand by preparing a new spatial model in an Olympic space that will reach its maximum regional extent for the Grenoble Games 1968. The burgeoning infrastructural demand will ensure that the city of Grenoble will carry out a new transformation project that will involve central government support to increase tourism and commerce in

¹ With a resident population of 447,200, the city was by far the most significant centre to have hosted the Games to that date. The larger population created new opportunities for the type of facilities offered, as viability and future use after the Games were more than assured (Essex, 2017).

mountainous areas². Grenoble, in 1968, proposed different accommodation solutions in the central fabric of the city, in an area adjacent to the main stadium characterised by removable elements in the post-Olympic phase. The structures of the Olympic Village were proposed by implementing a rationalist style reminiscent of Le Corbusier's idea for functional city planning. However, the Olympic residences were planned to meet the needs of the French locality to benefit the university, residents and winter tourism. The Olympic Village was organised in 11 blocks between 4 and 5 storeys high. In addition, the provision of new infrastructure (highways, roads, railway lines and airports) would define a new model of Olympic organisation.

The lodgings were included within a priority urbanisation area, identified within the general plan as an area of new interest for regional development. Therefore, at this stage, the Olympic event will be transformed into a catalyst for regional development capable of implementing infrastructural interventions, as in the 1960 Rome summer edition. Like Grenoble, Sapporo (1972) implemented a project for the redevelopment and redefinition of urban areas and regional infrastructure (Kagaya, 1991).

The Japanese city became the first metropolis with more than 1 million inhabitants to host the winter event. The Japanese housing has been included in a housing expansion plan that residents will use in the post-event phase through the provision of block structures. The following phase allows us to observe how the housing emergency will be the crucial element influencing the layout and construction of the residences. Meanwhile, in the mountain resorts, only a few accommodation facilities will be built to accommodate the participants of the Alpine disciplines. The Sapporo accommodation will promote a new construction model that will impact the host area significantly. The complex will be built by constructing 20 residential blocks between 5 and 11 storeys high (COJO, 1972).

Furthermore, Sapporo would be the first Olympic city not to have sports facilities. Until 1968, it was essential to have sports facilities to bid for the Olympic event. At the same time, the 1976 Innsbruck edition proposed the construction of a new Olympic Village in an area adjacent to the one built for the 1964 edition (OCOG, 1976). Therefore, as was the case for the 1964 edition, housing was arranged to reflect the reuse philosophy. The new neighbourhood will promote an expansion of the previously built neighbourhood, and the housing will be available to residents. Until the 1988 Canadian edition in Calgary, the winter edition was characterised by increased participation, and cities began to promote new design solutions for Olympic housing. Calgary is recognised as the first winter edition city to propose university-style housing solutions (Olds, 1998). In addition, the organising committee focused the project on constructing new sports facilities for university students and promoting winter sports (COJO, 1988).

Calgary's solution will stimulate future editions, proposing a new transformation model for the winter edition. Meanwhile, the third phase will be characterised by increasing the size of the Olympic space. Finally, the implementation of sports disciplines and the increase in the number of participants will imply the development of new sports facilities and multiple Olympic villages.

² The Grenoble project was financed by the central government and the French central bank in a framework of international trade development.

Phase 4: Tourism Development Tool (1992-2002)

Albertville 1992 will be the first winter project to design multiple accommodation solutions in mountain resorts. Thus, the Olympic villages will be located within an area included in the tourism development plans of the entire region. However, Albertville 1992 proposed a polycentric spatial model that included and strengthened the region's position as an international tourist centre (Terret, 2008). The large budget prepared for the event allowed for the construction of many accommodation facilities throughout the region, renewing the entire mountain infrastructure system to reposition the resorts within the tourism strategies. The provision of eight accommodation facilities ensured that the whole region met the Olympic requirements and allowed for a spatial dimension never observed until 1992.

However, after Albertville, the IOC began to raise serious concerns about the size of the event. From then on, the winter event would establish itself as a new instrument capable of redefining new territories and repositioning cities in a winter tourism market.³

During the 1994 Lillehammer edition, the organising committee introduced the theme of materials and temporality to the Olympic accommodation. In addition, the organising committee introduced the theme of sustainability and sustainable development by providing 185 removable wooden huts (COJO, 1994). The solution used by Lillehammer will inspire the entire Olympic movement and future candidate cities. Therefore, after Lillehammer, the theme of sustainability and environmental friendliness has become essential for the winter edition (of the Hall, 2023). Lillehammer allowed the IOC to add sustainability as the third pillar of the Olympic movement. The next edition in Nagano in 1998 will propose the construction of a new sports district. The 1998 Japanese edition was part of a series of regional transformations that used the metropolis as the centre of strategies.

For example, constructing the railway line between Nagano and Tokyo would transform the city's economy. The Olympic lodgings were planned on the city's outskirts to be converted into private residences in the post-Olympic period. The village was built by constructing 23 residential blocks ranging in height from 2 to 4 storeys (COJO, 1998). Subsequently, Salt Lake 2002 will propose housing solutions to implement university housing, as observed in Calgary in 1988. In addition, the organisers developed new measures to protect the environment, including new sustainable development processes for the event (OCOG, 2002). The Salt Lake programme ensured that the organisers met their carbon reduction target and confirmed themselves as one of the most sustainable events ever.

Phase 5: Multiple Olympic Villages in a Regionalisation Context (2006-2022)

Within the fifth phase, the Turin 2006 edition again changed the spatial dimension of the Olympic event. The Piedmont edition will be the first to implement sustainable development practices with the help of strategic evaluation. The organisers proposed a new spatial model with the metropolitan city as the venue for the ceremonies, the ice races, the media villages and the leading

³ The number of overnight stays increased from 100,000 in 1989 to 700,000 in 1995. Thus, in 1996, Brides' financial situation aligned with expectations. The municipality's budget grew from 15 million francs in 1992 to 25 million francs in 1996 (Sordet, 1996).

athletes' village. The committee proposed two mountain resorts for the competitions: Bardonecchia and Sestriere. The following spatial organisation and the provision of three Olympic Villages enabled the areas to transform the territory permanently and encouraged an increase in winter tourism. The central Olympic Village was planned in a disused area previously included in the city's master plan and would become a mixed area (services, residences, shops and offices) in the post-Olympic period. However, the whole area never became a mixed area, as it still suffers from structural problems and was occupied by people awaiting political asylum in 2012. Initially, the Olympic Villages in the mountain resorts were used as hotels and holiday flats. The construction of the Olympic Village in Bardonecchia was part of a regional development plan that involved reconstructing and reconfiguring a 1930s building. The Sestriere Olympic Village was built by a private company that undertook the construction of the resort with the commitment to hand it over free of charge to the organising committee to hold the Olympic event. The transformations in Turin were emblematic in terms of the revaluation and transformation of post-industrial metropolises. This strategy aimed to extend the benefits of the Olympic investment beyond the city, i.e. to the entire region, thanks to the possibility of improving ski facilities and facilities and extending the tourist season (Dansero, 2003). Therefore, the dimension of the winter event in the fourth phase will turn into a metropolitan event that will inspire the reconstruction of the regional infrastructure (della Sala, 2023b).

Subsequently, Vancouver 2010 advanced a new mixed-finance model by introducing a new post-Olympic planning model that will be a tool to promote long-term Olympic investment (VanWynsberghe, 2012). The construction of the Olympic housing was planned in an area included in an urban regeneration project. Thus, the execution of the Olympic Village took place in an abandoned area that, thanks to private support, could be finished to provide new residential accommodation in the post-event period. The new neighbourhood consisted of 37 buildings between 5 and 10 storeys high; in the post-Olympic period, it was reconfigured and transformed into a central space of the Vancouver metropolis (COJO, 2010). However, the Vancouver Olympic Village will manifest other problems related to Olympic building speculation in the post-Olympic period (Scherer, 2011). The goal of developing mixed-market housing has been modified to provide only 10 per cent of the planned 30 per cent. In the post-Olympic period, rising rental prices increased evictions in the city (Essex, 2017). At the Sochi Games in 2014, a territorial organisation was proposed as a crucial step in expanding the new Olympic event to locations with a subtropical climate (Scott, 2015). The event aimed to develop a new territorial system by preparing new tourist sites and planning multiple Olympic villages connected with a railway system. After the 2014 edition in Sochi, the size of the winter event will continue to grow, becoming a stimulus for transforming the regional system. The organisers will plan the Olympic event using a solution based on constructing three Olympic villages – one main village is near the ice facilities, and two other Olympic villages are in the mountain sites. Ninety-nine new buildings will be constructed between 2 and 7 storeys (OCOG, 2014). The central Olympic Village will be converted into private residences in the post-Olympic period, while the mountain lodgings will be converted into hotels and resorts to promote tourism to the site. However, the post-Olympic edition has been widely criticised for the considerable financial investment and the size of the event.

PyeongChang and Beijing 2022 will be other editions using Olympic Villages to promote sports tourism in mountain resorts. PyeongChang provided a model of metropolitan aggregation with the reuse of accommodation as private residences in the post-Olympic period. However, the mountain lodgings are still awaiting use today. On the other hand, Beijing 2022 will make the Chinese metropolis the first city in the world to host both the summer and winter editions. The Chinese edition represents a critical moment in metropolitan and regional expansion. The spatial model, strongly inspired by Turin 2006, envisaged three Olympic Villages within a vast regional territory.

The central accommodations were built in the area bordering the Olympic Village for the 2008 edition and will be converted into residences by public tender in the post-Olympic period. Meanwhile, accommodations in the mountainous locations were built to become hotels or tourist flats in the post-Olympic period.

Phase 6: Tool for infrastructural development of tourism sites. Multiple cities, multiple regions (2026-Future)

During this phase, the distance between the metropolis and the venues will reach an average of 115.63 km, promoting a new form of joint bidding between different locations (Milan-Cortina in 2026 and Barcelona-Pyrenees in 2030). Beijing, in 2022, will mark the beginning of a new ephemeral era, where metropolises will only use the event to promote their services and position themselves as global tourist locations. Therefore, in this latest phase, the Metropolitan Olympic Village has become a key element in the housing planning of the world's future metropolises, inscribed in the new urban dynamics of consumer societies (della Sala, 2023b). Furthermore, the Milan-Cortina edition of 2026 will involve three different regions in the northeastern area of Italy through the organisation of two principal cities and 13 secondary venues. The following dimension will produce a new evolution of the winter event, becoming an instrument for the economic reorganisation of almost 1/5 of an entire state. Furthermore, the following dimension will imply new infrastructural challenges for the territories involved in the organisation. Finally, the candidature of Barcelona and the Pyrenees for the 2030 edition and France 2030 allows a new extraterritorial dimension to be observed for the organisation of the winter event.

The different stages of the development of the Winter Olympic Village					
Phase	Period	Spatial model	Aspects	Olympic Cities	
Phase I	1924-1948	Mountain locations Temporary accommodation	Prospects for the creation of an Olympic Village	1924	Chamonix
			Existing sports facilities	1928	St. Moritz
			Use of hotels and resorts	1932	Lake Placid

				1936 Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1948 St Moritz
Phase II	1952-1964	Cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants Permanent accommodation	Construction of the Olympic Village Different areas for the celebration of the event Developing a public policy for Olympic accommodation Growing interest in winter sports	1952 Oslo 1956 Cortina 1960 Squaw Valley 1964 Innsbruck
Phase III	1968-1988	Regional expansion Residential accommodation	Encouragement for the creation of new sports facilities Development of the infrastructural system for the transfer of athletes. The foundations are laid for the development of residential accommodation in the post-Olympic phase. New transformation model	1968 Grenoble 1972 Sapporo 1976 Innsbruck 1980 Lake Placid 1984 Sarajevo 1988 Calgary
Phase IV	1992-2002	Increase in Olympic space Tourism development tool	Increase of competitions and athletes Construction of multiple Olympic Villages New housing solutions (universities, demountable) Olympic space organised in multiple locations Respect for the environment	1992 Albertville 1994 Lillehammer 1998 Nagano 2002 Salt Lake City
Phase V	2006-2022	Olympic Village in the city and Olympic Villages at competition venues Stimulus for the transformation of the regional system	Main Olympic Village in the metropolitan city Mixed economy for the construction of the residences in the mountain places The Olympic Village as a tool for the promotion of sports tourism in mountain areas Increased emphasis on environmental protection and the sustainable development Legacy begins to enter into post-Olympic planning	2006 Turin 2010 Vancouver 2014 Sochi

		Metropolis		2018	Pyeongchang
				2022	Beijing
Phase VI	2026 Future	-	Regional development Tool for the reorganisation of the economy of the Olympic area Creation of new mixed accommodation solutions Development of new infrastructure for the transport of Olympic athletes	2026	Milan-Cortina
		Multiple Olympic cities		2030	France
		Multiple regions		2034	Salt Lake City

Table 1. Stages of the Olympic Villages at the Winter Olympics (Source: Own implementation)

3. The long process of physical and imaginary transformation of the city of Turin

The 2006 edition in Turin is recognised as the first edition to reach an Olympic area, including seven mountain locations and providing three Olympic Villages. The 2006 Olympics award to Turin will mean an increase in the size of the winter event, which will be hosted by cities with more than one million inhabitants. The event was part of a strategy for the transformation and redefinition of metropolitan areas abandoned since the industrial crisis of the 1980s. Turin's 2006 project can, therefore, be compared to that of Barcelona 1992 as it included the event in a broader urban transformation strategy with a solid base supported by master plans and long-term strategic plans. The city of Turin, thanks to the inclusion of the Olympic event, had the opportunity to develop new areas, re-establish the old railway line, add new mixed-use facilities, re-establish pedestrian areas in the old town and other works, including the revaluation of emblematic spaces and buildings. *"The slogan of rebalancing and decentralisation effectively acquired a key role in the imagination of the general public"* (De Rossi, 2006, p. 15).

The transformation of the city of Turin and the definition of the practices used in constructing the new physical and imaginary city must be analysed through decisive moments to orient and complete the physical and imaginary transformation process.

- Rigotti Masterplan in 1959 (PRG) (Turin enlargement in 1950 and 1960).
- The public transport network in 1982.
- Programming guidelines 1985.
- Three central axes of the 1996 plan (between strategic areas and disused industrial areas).
- Green crown.
- Turin, city of water.

- The City of Cities (Second Strategic Plan) (A mix of multicentric, radio-centric rail and road structures, innovative transformation areas and historical and environmental merits).

In the proposal of the Preliminary Draft of the Turin Urban Plan of 1980, the objectives for the post-industrialisation of the city of Turin were included: “Diffusion of centrality; breaking the monopoly of the central areas; improvement of the urban environment; provision of low-cost housing, initially in the centre; acquisition of large areas, in the city and on the hills, for the common enjoyment of woods and parks, for the regeneration of the environment” (Radicioni, 1988, p. 71).

- Preliminary draft urban plan, 1980.
- They closed industrial zones in Turin in 1989 (Dansero, 1993).
- The strategic zones identified in the City Council’s programme, 1985-1990.

The operation carried out by Gregotti and Cagnardi had the great merit of summarising in physical images, such as that of the "*Spina Centrale*", very complicated intentions and forms of transformation: the recovery of industrial areas within Turin; the formation of new places and focal points; the interaction between urban renewal and infrastructural operations. The 1995 plan can be defined as a plan of redevelopment, reconstruction, redefinition and reconversion of abandoned industrial areas⁴.

Thus, the long road of building a new image of post-industrial Turin began with its central areas, squares and main streets.

For the first time in the twentieth century, it was the physical image of Turin’s spaces that was given a strategic role in defining the priorities of the new administrative policies (De Rossi, 2006).

Projects

- Redefinition of Piazza Castello, 1999.
- Pedestrian and restricted traffic zones (2000).
- PRIU Improvement and conversion programmes for Spina 1, 3 and 4.
- Integrated PRIN programme for Spina 2.
- ZUTS Urban Transformation Zones (1999 with the allocation of the Olympic event).
- Spina 2 (Politecnico, OGR, Residenza Borsellino).
- The Regional Territorial Plan (PTR) approved in 1997.
- The territorial coordination plan of the CTP was approved in 1999.
- Progetto Speciale Periferie (Artesio, 1997).

⁴ It is also advisable to go deeper with developed plans to identify areas for renovation. See: Urban transformation zones (ZUT) and Projects for the PRG (City of Turin, 1994).

Subsequent projects

- Corona Verde (FUNDED BY SPD 2000-2006).
- Turin city of water.
- Hundred Places Project.
- Territorial plan of the Pinerolo area.
- The Val di Susa territorial pact.
- The Leader Plus programme “Escartons and Valli Valdesi”. Identity and sustainability for an Olympic landscape.
- The Interreg III "Alte Valli" programme.
- The Turin 2006 integrated zonal plan (to take advantage of the development opportunities linked to the Olympic event and elaborating an integrated plan for the financing of SPD 2 and the phasing out (2000-2006) of the Piedmont region (Dansero *et al.*, 2003).

Thus, we can see how socio-economic development issues were strongly implicated in the physical aspects of the habitat, urban environment, infrastructure and green areas.

Turin was the first Italian city to have a strategic plan in 2000 (De Rossi, 2006). The plan consisted of six strategic intervention lines, twenty objectives, and eighty-four measures for implementing it. Implementing the strategic plan, creating the *Torino Internazionale* association and the metropolitan urban centre and appointing a city architect are signs of the growing awareness of the current metamorphosis (De Rossi, 2006).

However, the Olympics allowed the city of Turin to carry out millions of euros worth of public works, including more than a thousand operations on roads and streets in and around Turin.

In consideration of the economic development of the city of Turin, the first available data for analysing economic development in Turin is the value added at current prices. The following value represents the difference between the production value of goods and services and intermediate production costs during a given period. Therefore, through the following variables, it is possible to assess the economic growth and productivity of companies in the area. In 2020, the following value was EUR 22,857 per capita and reached EUR 29,928 per capita in 2019 (the last year for which data is available). The difference between the survey period represents an increase of +30.94%.

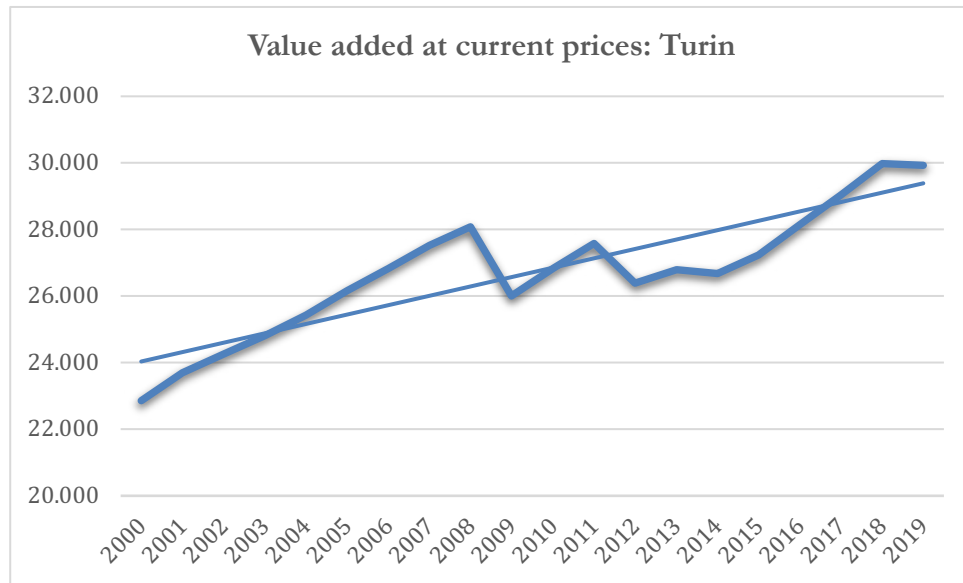


Fig 1. Value added at current prices: Turin from 2000 to 2019 (Source: Comitato Giorgio Rota)

Another significant element for understanding the economic performance of the city of Turin is foreign trade. In 1991, Turin's imports amounted to 6,649 million euros, while exports were 8,623 million euros. Turin in the early 1990s was therefore characterised by a favourable foreign trade balance of 1,974 million euros. Subsequently, in 2001, the city's imports rose to 11,726 million euro (+76.35% over 1991), while exports rose to 16,045 million euro (+86.07% over 1991), leading to a positive trade balance of 4,319 million euro (+118.26% over 1991). Whereas, in 2011, there was an increase in imports, which rose to €15,183 million (+28.48% over 2001), as well as exports, which reached €18,023 million (+12.33% over 2001). The total trade balance in 2011 remained positive and amounted to Euro 2,841 million, but contracted by 34.23% compared to 2001. Finally, in 2021, imports amounted to EUR 19,001 million (+25.15% in 2011) and exports to EUR 20,746 million (+15.11% in 2011). This increase in imports greater than exports led to a percentage drop in the trade balance in 2021 compared to 2001 -38.57%, with a value of EUR 1,745 million.

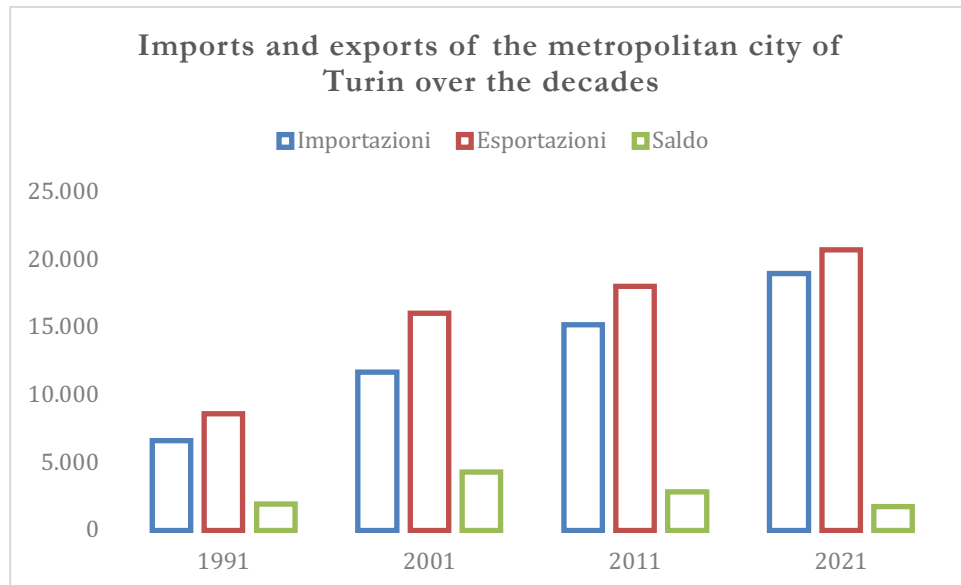


Fig 2. Imports and exports of the metropolitan city of Turin from 1991 to 2021 (Source: Comitato Giorgio Rota)

Finally, the last significant variable for understanding the city of Turin's economic performance refers to the distribution structures' size. In 2005, Turin, the most crucial number of commercial establishments, comprised neighbourhood shops (no. 31,429). The remaining shops were divided into 1,709 medium-sized establishments and 80 large establishments. Subsequently, during 2006 and 2007, there was an increase in the number of neighbourhood shops. The peak was reached in 2007 with 33,612 neighbourhood establishments (+6.95% over 2005). However, in 2018, there was a further peak in the presence of neighbourhood establishments, when they reached 34,354 (+2.21% over the 2007 peak). Meanwhile, as far as medium-sized establishments are concerned, there was an increase in their number until 2009, when Turin was characterised by 1,838 medium-sized establishments (+7.55% over 2005). However, from 2010 until 2016, there was a gradual decrease in medium-sized structures, from 1,657 medium-sized activities in 2010 to 1,468 in 2016, constituting a decrease of -11.41%. While in 2017 and 2018 there was a live recovery in the number of these activities, reaching 1,598 in 2018 (+8.86% in 2016). Finally, regarding extensive facilities, there was a progressive increase from 2005 to 2018, a period in which these activities increased from 80 units to 105 in 2018, i.e., there was an increase of +31.25% over 2005.

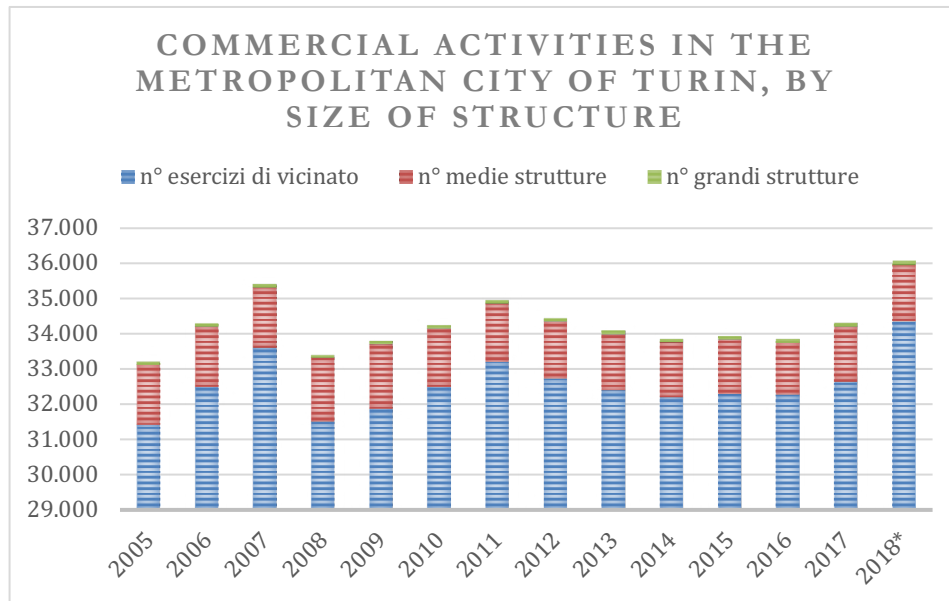


Fig 3. Commercial activities in Turin city 2005-2018 (Source: Comitato Giorgio Rota)

In conclusion, the economic development of Turin over the period analysed shows a significant growth in per capita added value, which can be observed as increased productivity and economic welfare. Therefore, the analysis of foreign trade highlights the strong performance of the city's exports but also underlines the difficulties of maintaining a positive trade balance in the presence of an increase in imports. Meanwhile, the structural evolution of the retail sector suggests a complex interaction between neighbourhood shops, medium-sized establishments, and ample outlets, each responding to changing market dynamics and consumer behaviour. In the future, policy and business leaders in Turin should focus on supporting productivity growth, increasing export competitiveness, and supporting a diversified and resilient retail sector to ensure balanced and inclusive economic development. By addressing these areas, Turin can continue to build on its economic strengths and address the challenges posed by a changing global and local financial landscape. *“The dark side of the event is represented by the 100,000 jobs lost during the same period in the manufacturing sector due to the closure of so many factories”* (De Rossi, 2006, p. 15).

4. Conclusion: Towards new forms of regionalisation and new spatial models

Looking at different urban planning experiences proposed by candidate cities during the 20th century and in the 21st century, we can identify a new transformation of the spatial dimension. The winter edition was developed by preparing primary models that were not essentially urbanistic, bound to the identity of mountain resorts. Therefore, these models were developed temporarily for the sports event. Whereas, from the second half of the 20th century, starting with the Oslo edition in 1952, the winter event enabled the establishment of new, more complex and permanent urbanisation models to be observed. In parallel, the Olympic Village shows the exact

evolution of the construction criteria observed in the summer edition. The new strategies' arrival point will implement the metropolitan and regional dimensions observed after the Turin 2006 experience. The regional model examined in the Turin 2006 edition establishes the validity of a central structure based on the metropolitan city and the different venues distributed within the regional space. Therefore, the new regional expansion model is configured in different locations, implying the creation of new networks within a larger space. Within the regional space, mountain locations have only become of fundamental importance for holding sports competitions. The metropolitan city will only be the central element of the host cities' territorial marketing strategy. Territorial promotion will be the highest expression of the regional development model of the host cities.

Moreover, mountains were sometimes excluded from the overall project in the post-Olympic phase. Thus, it is emphasised that the Winter Olympics can affect the territory through different scales of intervention and yet some models can affect the territorial organisation permanently. In Olympic history, regionalisation and temporal connections dissolved and disappeared in the post-Olympic period. However, the Milan-Cortina 2026 edition, in which three regions and two main cities will participate, will change the Olympic space again. Establishing a central city, a cluster in the mountains and other competition venues distributed in a new spatial dimension will increase the size of the Olympic area to a maximum distance of 370 km between the city of Milan and Anterselva di Mezzo, the competition venue.

So, what will happen to the Olympic venues of the future? Will they only be real estate speculation projects, or will they promote new housing strategies in the metropolitan city?

The projects of future editions (Paris 2024, Milan-Cortina 2026; Los Angeles 2028, and Brisbane 2032) provide new elements to observe a model of an Olympic Village established in the central area of the world's largest metropolises. Moreover, the model proposed by the new editions implies the creation of mixed spaces capable of hosting different functions. However, as noted above, the winter edition implies the creation of multiple accommodations within a larger territory. Therefore, the construction of the accommodations in central areas will cause a change in the construction strategies of the new districts, as they will have to be inscribed in the existing urban fabric. Thus, the Olympic Village has been transformed from a temporary sports district into an area subject to real estate speculation in the post-Olympic period. The reduction of green spaces in our contemporary metropolises implies a greater interest on the part of planners in planning Olympic accommodation in areas with a more significant real estate attraction.

Finally, we want to emphasise the importance of strategic planning in the perspective of sustainable development of future territories. Integrating strategic lines in a joint development framework can reduce the possibilities of failure and uncertainty observed in the post-event phase. The Olympic Games are special events that must fit into the context of the ordinary planning of the host cities and territories. The Olympic Village, which is planned through a long-term strategy, is a dynamic instrument for the host territory. This underscores its importance and keeps the reader engaged in the ongoing debate and research on living in specific contexts.

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Des stades, des Lions Indomptables et des liturgies politiques à la CAN Total Energies Cameroon 2021: une géopolitique du nouveau sportif au Cameroun

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Abstract

This text analyses how the Renouveau Sportif is constructing the Cameroonian state through a Nation branding of the CAN Total Energies Cameroon 2021 based on stadiums, the Indomitable Lions and political liturgies. This partisan political culture mobilizes these major sites of conflict in the representation of football for the Cameroon branding of the CAN. Drawing on the contributions of sport power and power branding, a one and plural geopolitics guides this analytical approach to account for the conflicts arising from the Branding around the competition. A mixed methodological approach consisting of interviews with resource persons and documentary resources from a media watch on stadiums, the Indomitable Lions and political liturgies, structures this analysis. These major sites of conflict in the representation of football will be presented as stages in the construction of the state through football, before being illustrated as arenas in this process.

Keywords: Can Total Energies Cameroon 2021, Cameroon Branding, Renouveau Sportif, Geopolitics, State Building.

1. Introduction: le Renouveau Sportif comme le creuset politique de la construction étatique par la CAN Total Energies Cameroon 2021

La Can Total Energies Cameroon 2021 (9 janvier-6 février 2022) confirme comment les mégas événements sportifs construisent l'État camerounais par une politisation du football. Cette seconde phase finale de la Coupe d'Afrique des Nations (CAN) accueillie par le pays après 1972, intervient après deux reports autour de cette compétition (2019 et 2021). Elle est patrimonialisée par le Renouveau Sportif (Njoya, 2007, p. 383). Il renvoie à la mise en scène de l'État camerounais autour du sport grâce aux discours publics construits par le régime organisé autour du président Paul Biya et du Rassemblement démocratique du Peuple Camerounais (RDPC) depuis 1982.

La politisation du football au Cameroun est largement tributaire d'une hiérarchisation charismatique des disciplines sportives par l'État, en fonction de leurs effets performatifs dans la société (Njoya, 2007; Anafack, 2016; Okoudou Amougou, 2022). La popularité du football le hisse au sommet de la hiérarchie des disciplines sportives au Cameroun, malgré des discours publics refusant d'en faire un *sport-roi*. La réception des vainqueurs des CAN ou de la médaille olympique en football par le Président de la République contraste avec l'occultation des champions d'Afrique dans les autres disciplines (handball; volley-ball; haltérophilie; etc.) par la même figure présidentielle.

Trois grandes séquences singularisent cette politisation du football. L'introduction de ce sport par la France pendant la période de mandat (1916-1946) répond aux enjeux d'un contrôle social et politique des populations indigènes par les colons. L'État postcolonial camerounais poursuit ce processus de politisation sous une présidentialisation du football par le régime Ahidjo (1957-1982). Elle est mise au service de l'unité nationale et du rayonnement international du pays dans un contexte de lutte contre la rébellion nationalitaire de l'Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC). Cette politisation concerne d'abord les succès des clubs camerounais en coupes africaines (Oryx: 1965; Canon de Yaoundé: 1971, 1978, 1979, 1980; Tonnerre Kalara Club: 1975; Union de Douala: 1979, 1981), avant de traiter l'organisation de la CAN en 1972, année de l'avènement de l'État unitaire après un référendum mettant un terme à une décennie fédérale dans le pays (1961-1972). La défaite du Cameroun en demi-finale du tournoi structure un décret organisant l'équipe nationale.

Le régime Biya (1982 à nos jours) prolonge ces dynamiques de présidentialisation du football. Les victoires des Lions Indomptables à la CAN (1984; 1988; 2000; 2002; 2017), la médaille olympique (2000) et le record africain de 8 participations à la coupe du monde (1982; 1990; 1994; 1998; 2002; 2010; 2014; 2022) sont des ressources présidentielles mobilisées face à la tentative de putsch en 1984, à la libéralisation politique des années 90 ou aux luttes contre les terrorismes islamiste et nationalitaire de Boko Haram et du séparatisme ambazonien.

C'est dans cette configuration globale que le Renouveau Sportif comme culture politique partisane reproduit ainsi la politisation antérieure de la CAN 1972 par le régime d'Ahmadou Ahidjo (Anafack, 2016) en 2022. Trois lieux majeurs de conflits (Dechézelles & Olive, 2016) se distinguent dans sa représentation du football. Les stades, l'équipe nationale fanion et les liturgies politiques sont accaparés par le *Cameroon branding* de la CAN 2021 (Onomo Onomo et al., 2021; Tichaawa & Hemmonsby, 2022).

Leurs usages politiques par le Renouveau Sportif s'insèrent dès lors, dans les débats d'une littérature consacrée à la construction étatique par le sport (Poli, 2007; Augustin, 2010; Verschuuren, 2013; Le Margoariet, 2020; Issekin, 2022b) au sein d'une sportocratie mondiale (Aubin, 2024). Celle-ci est

un nouvel ordre social, politique et géopolitique animé par la puissance du sport (sport power) utilisée par divers acteurs pour promouvoir leurs intérêts, influencer la sphère sociale et influencer les relations humaines à toutes les échelles, du local à l'international (Aubin, 2024, p.53).

En interrogeant sa désoccidentalisation du football, ses rivalités multiscalaires et sa politique de l'apolitisme, la politisation de la CAN 2021 par le Renouveau Sportif s'inscrit dans les thèses du retour de l'État dans cette sportocratie, grâce à une réforme forcée de la gouvernance du sport (Boniface et al., 2021) dont il est le principal acteur.

Deux hypothèses émergent de ce *Cameroon branding* par la CAN2021. Si les stades, les Lions Indomptables et les liturgies politiques sont des scènes de la construction étatique au Cameroun par ce tournoi, elles se transforment aussi en arènes de ce processus, suite aux épreuves et aux limites quant à ce *Nation branding* dans et hors du pays.

Une géopolitique une et plurielle (Subra, 2012) guidant cette démarche d'analyse rend compte des conflits autour du *Cameroon Branding* du RDPC autour de la CAN. Ce raisonnement géographique mobilise principalement des représentations (Lacoste, 2012) pour analyser les rivalités de pouvoir liées aux stades, aux Lions Indomptables et aux liturgies politiques autour de cette compétition. Idées vraies ou fausses mobilisées pour changer des rapports de force durant des conflits, ces représentations capitalisent les apports du *sport power* et du *power branding* pour comprendre comment le Renouveau Sportif construit son *Cameroon Branding* autour de ces lieux. Le *sport power* (Verschuuren, 2013) s'intéresse aux instrumentalisation des lieux de représentations du football par les administrations, les pouvoirs locaux ou les individus pour construire un rayonnement international camerounais à partir de la CAN. Le *power branding* (Filler & Filomonov, 2017) est une construction d'une ou de plusieurs représentations du pouvoir d'État à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur d'un pays, suite au consensus explicite entre les populations et les élites. Il perpétue le Renouveau Sportif en participant à améliorer auprès des opinions publiques locale et internationale, les images de ses élites, de ses politiques publiques et de ses territoires par le tournoi.

Des matériaux de nature diverse sont mobilisés pour traiter des lieux de représentation du football investis par le Renouveau Sportif. Notre méthodologie s'appuie sur une démarche avant tout qualitative. Composite, elle combine des entretiens ouverts, une ethnographie en ligne, une observation *in situ* et une veille médiatique pour analyser les stades, les Lions Indomptables et les liturgies politiques.

Le premier lieu traitant des stades bénéficie des apports des matériaux d'enquête collectés entre décembre 2021 et septembre 2022 dans le cadre d'un chapitre d'ouvrage traitant de la géopolitique des stades au Cameroun (Issekin, 2022b). Elle prolonge le débat engagé autour de l'étatisation par le football au Cameroun, en revenant sur les perspectives entrevues dans ce texte. Le second lieu s'intéresse à l'équipe nationale de football. Sa logique composite des matériaux s'appuie sur la veille médiatique, un corpus documentaire et des entretiens ouverts entre décembre 2021 et septembre 2023. Des articles issus des titres des presses nationale et extranationale sportive et généraliste sont associés à une littérature scientifique sur l'équipe nationale de football camerounaise pour revenir sur les discours prononcés par des acteurs nationaux et extranationaux dans l'espace public autour des Lions Indomptables sélectionnés pour la CAN 2021. Quatre (n :4) entretiens symbolisant les acteurs des politiques sélectives (un diplomate, un entraîneur de football en service au ministère en charge des sports, un journaliste, un ancien international camerounais) complètent ce dispositif méthodologique lié aux Lions Indomptables.

Le troisième lieu traitant des liturgies politiques s'appuie aussi sur un matériau composite. Une ethnographie en ligne recueille les réactions des citoyens camerounais face aux cérémonies d'ouverture et aux élections générales à la FECAFOOT sur Facebook. Ces données sont croisées avec des entretiens (n :7) des citoyens pour apprécier comment les imaginaires de politisation et de dépolitisation de ces liturgies politiques rejoignent les populations. Toutes ces données ont été recueillies entre décembre 2021 et septembre 2023, période d'observation choisie pour la rédaction de l'article.

Deux grandes difficultés d'ordre méthodologique ont été rencontrées. La contemporanéité de la période concernée par le Renouveau Sportif à travers le football précède la difficulté d'interviewer les acteurs encore engagés dans ces processus au sein de la verticale du sport. La sensibilité politique actuelle de cette question après la CAN tenue en 2022 n'est pas étrangère à ces défections. Le tableau de cette réflexion autour des lieux de la représentation du football est le suivant. Les stades, les Lions Indomptables et les liturgies politiques sont d'abord analysés comme des scènes de la construction étatique par le football. Ces lieux de sens sont ensuite présentés comme des arènes de ce processus à travers les limites et les résistances à ces cadrages représentationnels autour de la CAN.

2. Les stades, les Lions Indomptables et les liturgies politiques : des scènes de la construction étatique au Cameroun par la CAN TOTAL ENERGIES CAMEROON 2021

2.1 Des géopolitiques locales des stades au service d'une géopolitique interne à visée globale du Cameroun

Les géopolitiques locales du Programme National de Développement des Infrastructures Sportives (PNDIS) se mettent dès 2008, au service d'une géopolitique interne à visée globale du Cameroun. Ici, ses ambitions développementalistes croisent une mise en scène internationale du pays par ses infrastructures sportives pour produire ce sport power des stades dans la sportocratie planétaire (Aubin, 2024).

Ce programme lancé suite à la signature des documents contractuels par Ephraïm Inoni, premier Ministre, le 7 mai 2008, souhaite doter le Cameroun d'un ensemble d'infrastructures pour les sports de haut niveau et de masse entre 2008 et 2018 (Issekin, 2022b). La Chine est établie comme partenaire stratégique des "Grands Travaux" du Renouveau, à la sortie des contraintes néolibérales des Programmes d'Ajustement Structurel en cours depuis 1988. Deux volets composent ces travaux cofinancés par *Exim Bank of China* et le Cameroun et engagés par *China Machinery Engineering Corporation*.

Le premier volet est financé à hauteur de 272 milliards de FCFA. Décliné en trois phases, il cible le sport d'élite. Sa première phase (2008-2011) vise à construire des stades de 60.000 et 30.000 places à Yaoundé, à Douala, à Bafoussam et à Limbé. Sa deuxième phase (2011-2014) prévoit à hauteur de 94 milliards de FCFA, la construction d'une piscine olympique, d'un nouveau campus à l'Institut de la Jeunesse et des Sports (INJS) et d'un hôtel 3 étoiles à Olembé, avant d'aménager un palais des sports et une piste pour course de chevaux à Garoua. La troisième phase de ce volet construira à hauteur de 77,02 milliards de CFA, des stades omnisports de 15.000 et de 20.000 places à Bertoua, Ebolowa, Bamenda, Ngaoundéré, Maroua et Kumba, et des palais des sports à

Sangmélima et à Buea. Le second volet du PNDIS aménagera des plates-formes sportives dans tous les arrondissements du pays pour le sport de masse.

Comment comprendre ces politiques d'aménagement du Cameroun? Elles mettent d'abord en scène par le sport, un dépassement de sa dépendance financière vis-à-vis de ses bailleurs de fonds traditionnels (britannique, américain, français) au profit de la Chine. Le PNDIS est un signe de la vitalité économique camerounaise après une vingtaine d'années de PAS: il remet en cause les orientations néolibérales du FMI et de la Banque Mondiale, par la relance des Grands Travaux sportifs en pleine crise économique mondiale en 2008 (Issekin, 2022b).

La géopolitique des stades restructure aussi le Renouveau dans ses compétitions politique et électorale. L'internalisation du paradigme des relations internationales de la lutte contre la corruption (Boniface, 2016) à travers l'opération Épervier (Mbgba Ndjé, 2018), convertit cette opération judiciaire en ressource politique. Si la présence de tous les membres du gouvernement à la cérémonie de signature des documents contractuels du PNDIS, illustre cette adhésion à la présidentialisation de la lutte contre la corruption, sa tenue quelques jours avant la levée du verrou de la limitation des mandats présidentiels en avril 2008 (Tchoupie, 2009) consolide une géopolitique électorale nationale dominée par le RDPC à tous les échelons de pouvoir (Issekin, 2020). L'alignement du chronogramme des travaux du PNDIS aux cycles électoraux entre 2008 et 2022, se vérifie par la programmation de l'achèvement de la première phase du premier volet à la veille de l'élection présidentielle de 2011.



Fig 1. Synopsis des stades de la CAN

(<https://www.facebook.com/KmerWelcomesYou/photos/a.1572361769549904/2995074310611969/?type=3&app=fbl>)

L'accueil des grands événements sportifs sur son territoire introduit à la mise en scène internationale des stades du Cameroun. Elle relève principalement de sa capacité à coopérer avec la Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF) pour perpétrer des politiques communes encourageant l'aménagement des villes par les compétitions en Afrique (Augustin, 2010). Son

président camerounais Issa Hayatou affirme en marge de la cérémonie du PNDIS, que ce programme donnera au pays “la possibilité de briller au niveau mondial”(Issekin, 2022b).

La désignation du Cameroun pour organiser la CAN Féminine de 2016 le 22 septembre 2013 par le Comité Exécutif de la CAF, anticipe dans ce cas, une nouvelle organisation de la CAN après 1972. Sa candidature victorieuse à l’organisation de la CAN masculine 2019, confirme cette projection géopolitique en septembre 2014, à l’issue d’un vote devant l’Algérie, la Côte d’Ivoire, la Guinée, la République Démocratique du Congo et la Zambie. Mieux, l’organisation du CHAN en 2021 après le désistement de l’Ethiopie, poursuit cette stratégie de valorisation des stades camerounais par les compétitions.

Le *Nation Branding* (Melissen, 2005) des stades camerounais prolonge cette mise en scène internationale. Ce *Cameroon branding* autour de ces infrastructures sportives dépend d’un storytelling puisant dans le Renouveau Sportif. Ce storytelling se diffuse d’abord dans leur architecture : elle met en scène, la volonté de puissance du Cameroun en proposant 3 stades de plus de 40.000 dans les régions du Centre, du Littoral et du Nord aux normes FIFA (figure 1). L’augmentation des capacités d’accueil des stades héritées du régime Ahidjo par leur rénovation s’inscrit également dans cette logique.

La structure des 25 stades construits et rénovés pour la CAN renvoie à une modernité camerounaise revendiquée par leur vocation futuriste. Ils sont dans ce cas, des vitrines du “libéralisme communautaire” : elles mettent en scène une modernisation conservatrice du pays incarnée par la continuité du régime Ahidjo liée aux traces (Verschambre, 2008) des stades rénovés de la CAN de 1972. L’aménagement des nouveaux stades relève par contre d’une modernité revendiquée du Renouveau Sportif par l’introduction des symboles camerounais dans ces marques (Verschambre, 2008). Les couleurs du drapeau national présentes sur les sièges installés dans les stades, croisent la figure léonine omniprésente par des statues, les mascottes *Lili* et *Mola* ou les fanions. Ces stades d’envergure mondiale deviennent les vitrines d’un Cameroun résilient dans un contexte mondial travaillé par la lutte contre le Covid-19 et la récession en 2022. Une mise en scène d’une utilisation équilibrée du territoire national par des campagnes de communication en ligne et sur les médias classiques, parachève ce *Cameroon Branding* des stades. La représentation géopolitique du Cameroun comme “l’Afrique en miniatures” faisant du pays, une synthèse géographique et sociologique des Afriques s’adapte en fonction des sites. Les cultures sahéliennes mises en avant à Garoua, diffèrent des spécificités du littoral camerounais mobilisés autour des sites de Douala et de Buea-Limbé. L’identité forestière des sites de Mfandena et d’Olembé anticipe une autre identité des *Grassfields* valorisée dans les contenus liés au site de Bafoussam.

Cinq régions sur dix possibles sont mobilisées pour accueillir les six sites de la CAN. Le Centre, le Littoral, le Sud-Ouest, l’Ouest et le Nord incarnent le “Cameroun des stades” (Issekin, 2022b). Ce partage construit l’image d’un développement équilibré du territoire national. Il déconstruit des discours autour du syndrome de la tête de Goliath (Prévôt-Schapira, 2001) l’accusant de concentrer les sites de la CAN en dessous de l’Adamaoua. Par contre, “le Cameroun hors les stades” est identifié aux 5 autres régions n’abritant aucun site de la compétition (Adamaoua, Est, Extrême Nord, Nord-Ouest, Sud). Il est intégré à la CAN par les Fans zones. Ces technologies du spectacle sportif viennent préserver aux yeux des opinions internationale et nationale, une

unité du territoire camerounais en dehors des réalités géopolitiques internes liées aux aménagements sportifs.



Fig 2. Un message du Renouveau au sein du stade d'Olembé

(<https://www.facebook.com/1572361719549909/posts/pfbid0eh9rtNz8HqVAUK4JGZjwrVnantPreheUHAQuBUXGrhk i8QYASr3vrxyWZDLHJgzrl/?app=fbl>.)

Cette mise en scène du territoire camerounais par la diplomatie publique des stades, se poursuit en Afrique Centrale. Les stades sont des vecteurs de l'intégration sous régionale : la succession des CAN organisées en Afrique centrale depuis 2010 croise la participation des voisins Équatoguinéens et Gabonais au tournoi en 2022. L'échelle africaine révèle ensuite un *sport power* des stades inscrivant le Cameroun en seconde position des pays susceptibles d'organiser des CAN à 24 équipes. Il est ex-aequo avec l'Égypte, derrière l'Afrique du Sud, dans une note de la CAF de juin 2022. Les 7 stades camerounais participent à la lutte pour le maintien d'un ancrage subsaharien à la compétition panafricaine, suite à l'affaiblissement de la capacité de ces États à organiser la CAN face aux puissances septentrionales et australes depuis le décret du 20 juillet 2017 de la CAF. Les stades camerounais sont enfin des protecteurs des intérêts sportifs africains au niveau mondial. Ils rivalisent avec les arènes européennes pour le contrôle des flux sportifs liés à la production médiatique de la compétition, à la mise en scène d'une sécurité sanitaire face au Covid-19 et au maintien de la CAN entre janvier et février 2022.

2.2. Les pratiques sélectives camerounaises au service de la géopolitique de la nation par le football

La CAN 2021 révèle comment est-ce que la sélection nationale camerounaise de football participe à une géopolitique de la nation (Lacoste, 2012). Les pratiques sélectives au sein des Lions Indomptables et les discours autour d'elles, entendent des dynamiques identitaires évoluant entre dénationalisation et nationalisme sportif. Si la dénationalisation est une déconnexion entre l'État et la nation (Poli, 2007), le nationalisme sportif (Liotard, 1997) insiste sur un retour de la question nationale dans les pratiques sélectives pendant la CAN.

Les dynamiques d'un équilibre transnational dans les pratiques sélectives camerounaises (Issekin, 2021) correspondent avant tout à une idéologie étatique d'appropriation des tendances cosmopolites du football pour la construction sportive de la nation. Ces politiques internes camerounaises construisent et visibilisent une frontière entre le "nous" camerounais et les "autres" dans un supporterisme national (Fleury et al, 2016). Elles montrent ensuite comment ce "nous" intègre "l'autre" au sein des Lions Indomptables (Poli, 2006b; Anafack, 2016).

Cette stratégie étatique de protection des joueurs nationaux au service de la géopolitique de la nation dépend de deux décrets présidentiels sur les Lions Indomptables. La représentation de l'équilibre régional est au cœur du décret 72/600 du 31 octobre 1972 portant sur l'organisation de l'équipe nationale de football. Elle limite la sélection des Lions Indomptables aux joueurs locaux (Bekombo, 2021). Les raisons de ce choix sont liées à un impératif de l'Unité Nationale auquel les pratiques sélectives sacrifient : les enjeux étaient alors de renforcer la cohésion nationale en affaiblissant des dynamiques ethno régionales portées par les clubs locaux sous le monolithisme (Njoya, 2007). Dans cette optique, la création des sélections provinciales en 1972 participe à une géopolitique de l'équilibre régional des Lions Indomptables : elles instrumentalisent ces identités territoriales contre des nationalismes ethno régionaux exprimés par les clubs (Anafack, 2016).

Le décret 2014/384 du 26 septembre 2014 portant sur l'organisation et le fonctionnement des sélections nationales de football, marque l'avènement de la représentation géopolitique de l'équilibre transnational. Son "ambivalence normative" (Bekombo, 2021) étend la rhétorique de la protection des joueurs camerounais (Poli, 2006b) aux Camerounais à l'étranger. Sa forme rigide fixe d'abord des quotas en faveur des joueurs locaux au niveau des catégories inférieures, par l'article 7 du décret de 2014. Cette politique des quotas protège le travail formateur des clubs nationaux pour conserver une homogénéité culturelle aux Lions à travers des cohortes de joueurs qui évolueront plus tard en équipe fanion.



Fig 3. Liste des Lions Indomptables sélectionnés pour la CAN 2021

(<https://www.facebook.com/100064139559089/posts/pfbid0qhVBNyQpcP9YqjNdvvrqXT5SiBnzY6s1G9SGcVbaQXnihCD38EjabbWw3grwZCSJl/?app=fbl>)

La disparition de ces quotas au niveau de la sélection fanion confirme cette ambiguïté normative. Les joueurs nationaux évoluant à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur sont potentiellement sélectionnables, aux termes des alinéas 2 et 7 de l'article 7 du décret de 2014. Mieux, des stratégies de réintégration des Camerounais expatriés (Poli, 2006a) élargissent le droit à la nationalité camerounaise aux footballeurs dits "binationaux". Cette flexibilité vise à augmenter la compétitivité des Lions Indomptables: elle ratisse auprès des joueurs compétitifs à un niveau extra national pour augmenter leurs chances de rayonnement pendant les compétitions internationales (Issekin, 2021). La promotion d'un modèle national tenant compte des Camerounais à l'étranger intègre aussi des personnes d'origine camerounaise dans cette géopolitique de la nation sensible aux performances sportives.

La sociologie des joueurs sélectionnés au sein des Lions Indomptables pour la CAN 2021 (figure 3) entérine d'abord ce modèle géopolitique de l'équilibre transnational par une domination des joueurs expatriés. L'inexistence des joueurs locaux renvoie à leur déficit de compétitivité lié au caractère erratique de l'organisation des championnats locaux. Cette géopolitique des contextes de provenance des internationaux camerounais pour la CAN 2021 consacre l'hégémonie de l'Europe (21 joueurs sur 27 possibles) devant l'Asie (2 joueurs sur 27 possibles), l'Afrique (2 joueurs sur 27 possibles) et l'Amérique (2 joueurs sur 27 possibles). Elle épouse ici, des dynamiques de l'élargissement de "l'empire joyeux" (Boniface, 2014) incidents sur la construction étatique de la nation par le football.

La présence des 5 Eurafricains (Poli, 2006a) (un Allemand et quatre Français) sur les 27 Lions Indomptables expatriés, est la seconde tendance de la "Tanière" en 2022. Elle relève des stratégies camerounaises de réintégration des joueurs profitant des ouvertures offertes par la FIFA, suite à une possibilité de participer aux compétitions internationales sous la tunique vert-rouge-jaune, après avoir évolué dans les catégories inférieures des sélections étrangères (Bekombo, 2021). Le rajeunissement caractérise enfin cette sociologie des Lions Indomptables en 2022. L'équipe fanion est dans ce cas, une image de la jeunesse camerounaise qu'elle est appelée à incarner dans le culte du champion national (Liotard, 1997) dédié aux Lions Indomptables.

Sous cet angle, trois fonctions géopolitiques découlent des pratiques sélectives prises comme outils de la construction étatique de la nation (Loyer, 2019) par la CAN. Ces pratiques sélectives diffusent d'abord un ralliement sous le drapeau (Okoudou Amougou, 2022) par des performances internationales alimentant un appel à l'unité et à la solidarité en interne.

La réduction des tensions se manifeste aussi dans ces pratiques sélectives. Si les tensions manifestes renvoient aux crises camerounaises que le football participe à réduire au cours de la compétition, la prise en charge des Camerounais à l'étranger et des personnes d'origine camerounaise apparaît comme un site pour analyser leurs usages performatifs par les politiques sélectives (Bekombo, 2021).

Les pratiques sélectives construisent aussi le culte du champion national (Liotard, 1997). Ce sont ces joueurs nationaux et eurafricains sélectionnés qui serviront à déployer des liturgies politiques autour des succès et des échecs de la sélection fanion de football. La capacité des Lions Indomptables à réunir des joueurs d'origine disparate autour du Cameroun pour la CAN 2021 est dans ce cas, mise au service de l'unité nationale (Anafack, 2016).

2.3. Les cérémonies d'ouverture et de clôture de la CAN et les élections à la FECAFOOT au service d'une homogénéisation de l'identité nationale

Ces rituels sportifs à l'ombre de la CAN sont politisés. Ils entretiennent une identité camerounaise autour de cet événement politico-sportif. Une description sommaire des éléments entrant dans la construction de ces dispositifs rituels (Augé, 1994) précède l'analyse de leurs capacités à remettre en ordre l'unité nationale (Issekin, 2018) pendant cette CAN 2021.

La périodicité de ces dispositifs rituels les singularise d'abord. Les cérémonies d'ouverture et de clôture de la compétition et les élections à la FECAFOOT opèrent comme des rites d'institution (Bourdieu, 1982) : les dates choisies pour ces spectacles figent la périodicité liée à l'accueil de la CAN au Cameroun. C'est durant cette période que l'événement politico-sportif devient une forge étatique des corps (Riot & Bancel, 2017) incarnant la nation camerounaise au sein et en dehors des stades.

Les élections générales de la FECAFOOT obéissent à la même logique périodique. Elles se déroulent en décembre 2021, soit à un mois de la CAN. Ce processus électoral au sein de l'entité chargée d'assurer le service public du football (Couessu', 2021) restaure sa légitimité à pouvoir organiser le tournoi au Cameroun en toute autonomie, loin d'une normalisation portée par la FIFA.

La localisation de ces rituels identifie aussi comment ils participent à une diffusion interne et externe d'un supportérisme national (Fleury et al, 2016). La mobilisation du complexe d'Olembé prolonge cette camerounisation de la CAN exprimée par les deux cérémonies. En accueillant le match d'ouverture et la finale de la compétition, ce stade situé non loin de la Présidence de la République expose deux éléments d'une allocation autoritaire de l'unité nationale (Issekin, 2018) depuis Yaoundé.

Le pavoisement des militaires avant la parade culturelle mettant en scène des singularités géographiques du pays, est une modulation camerounaise de la neutralité du sport (Vassine, 2019). Elle met en scène la protection de l'unité nationale depuis le stade. Ces cérémonies mobilisent conjointement les deux langues officielles du pays par le duo de maîtres de cérémonie pour faire écho à un "Cameroun un et indivisible" (Njoya, 2007) au cours de la CAN. La présidentialisation de ces cérémonies par la présence du chef de l'État affine cette vocation unitaire des rituels. Le complexe audiovisuel d'État (Perelman, 2016) diffuse la revue militaire motorisée précédant l'arrivée et le départ du président Paul Biya: elle étend au Cameroun, le spectacle du complexe d'Olembé.



Figure 4. Le Président Paul Biya lors des hommages militaires à la cérémonie d'ouverture de la CAN.
(<https://www.lesoir.be/480908/article/2022-12-03/coupe-du-monde-quand-les-qataris-se-moquent-de-lelimination-de-lallemagne-en>)

Cette spatialisation de l'unité nationale se perçoit également au cours des élections à la FECAFOOT. La tenue des scrutins à l'hôtel Mont Fébé, hôtel étatique situé à quelques kilomètres de la présidence de la République, symbolise l'encadrement étatique de ce processus électoral. La mobilisation de cet espace pour le vote des différents délégués départementaux et des représentants corporatifs du football, réduit le Cameroun du football à la salle où se déroulent les scrutins. La présence du magistrat Schlick pour présider au processus électoral, renforce aussi cette pesanteur étatique sur ces élections fédérales. La pipolisation déployée autour de Samuel Eto'o Fils, ancien international camerounais au cours de cette campagne électorale à la veille de la CAN 2021, donne une tournure médiatique à ces élections générales. En représentant plusieurs publics (Mignot, 2016) des Lions Indomptables, la télédiffusion du processus électoral comme spectacle médiatique présidentialisant ces scrutins, lui construit un espace de légitimité nationale par une transparence mise en scène à travers la description des étapes de cette journée de vote. Les cérémonies d'ouverture et de clôture de la CAN et les élections à la FECAFOOT ont enfin des incidences sur le rétablissement de l'ordre autour de l'unité nationale. La camerounisation de la CAN est l'horizon des cérémonies d'Olembé : elle incarne la nation en ponctuant autoritairement le début et la fin de la compétition sur le territoire national. Les élections à la FECAFOOT poursuivent un but identique, en autonomisant le secteur sportif (Vassine, 2019) camerounais du processus de normalisation imposé par la FIFA. La proclamation des résultats en faveur de Samuel Eto'o acte dans ce cas, une reprise en main du football local par des footballeurs conforme aux discours réformateurs de la gouvernance du sport appelant à une plus grande implication des sportifs en son sein (Boniface et al., 2021).

Ces rituels remettent aussi en ordre l'unité nationale par la CAN. Les cérémonies d'ouverture et de clôture de la compétition diffusent des discours et des symboles condamnant la partition du Cameroun. Cette fête du sport est donc mobilisée pour rappeler le poids de la charismatisation du football par un Renouveau Sportif au service d'une identité nationale homogène (Njoya, 2007; Anafack, 2016). Les élections à la FECAFOOT misent également sur une remise en ordre du

football camerounais autour des questions de transparence et de légalité. Ces discours nationalistes puisent dans la grammaire austère du Renouveau pour critiquer une normalisation transnationale complaisante portée par la FIFA dans la gouvernance locale du football.

La préservation de l'unité nationale en dehors des joutes politiques au cours de la CAN clôt les usages de ces dispositifs rituels élargis. Les symboles matériels et discursifs mobilisés lors des cérémonies d'ouverture, survisibilisent avant tout, ce qui fait le liant entre les Camerounais et les Camerounaises. Paul Biya comme représentation géopolitique principale du pouvoir d'État (Filler & Filimonov, 2017) est présenté comme le symbole de cette camerounité sur les scènes au cours des cérémonies (figure 4). Le renouvellement de l'organe exécutif de la FECAFOOT poursuit cette logique comme un ralliement sous le drapeau (Issekin, 2018). Participer à ce processus électoral revient à faire allégeance au Cameroun afin d'éviter de voir une CAN organisée par une FECAFOOT sous normalisation. Les félicitations mutuelles après le verdict des urnes, sont un rituel de sortie de la normalisation actant ce ralliement au drapeau avant l'organisation de la compétition en 2022.

3. Les stades, les Lions Indomptables et les liturgies politiques : des arènes de la construction étatique par la CAN TOTAL ENERGIES CAMEROON 2021

3.1. Une identification géopolitique des risques externes à l'aménagement des stades

L'application d'une analyse géopolitique à l'identification des risques externes dans les projets d'aménagement des stades (Loyer, 2019; Belhoste, 2020; André, 2022) révèle d'abord des déséquilibres à l'échelle internationale liés à la remise en cause de la sinisation initiale du PNDIS. Une résistance camerounaise qui va dans le sens d'une multiplication des partenaires étrangers sous la concession des zonages couplant les nationalités des banques aux entreprises engagées dans ces projets d'aménagement de la CAN. Les partenaires chinois, turcs, marocains ou gabonais se repositionnent dans l'aménagement des nouveaux stades à Limbé, à Garoua et à Japoma. Le remplacement de la banque italienne *Intensa San Paolo* par la franco-britannique *Standard Chartered* illustre le retour des partenaires traditionnels contre la sinisation des stades, sous un passage de 138 milliards à 215 milliards de FCFA dans l'aménagement du complexe d'Olembé.

Cette résistance camerounaise épouse des logiques distinctes et complémentaires face aux déstabilisations de ses politiques d'aménagements. Si elle contourne une augmentation du coût de la compétition visant à l'amener à y renoncer, la multiplication des partenariats autour de l'aménagement des infrastructures vise aussi à dépasser ces volontés de délocalisation du tournoi émanant des puissances rivales du sport power camerounais à la CAF.

Les jeux géopolitiques autour du report de la CAN2019 du Cameroun au profit de l'Égypte révèlent une transition forcée (Gomez&Verschuuren, 2019) articulée autour de trois modes d'action. La défaite électorale d'Issa Hayatou (1988-2017) face au malgache Ahmad Ahmad en mars 2017 (34 voix contre 20), lors du congrès du 60^e anniversaire de la CAF à Addis-Abeba, résulte d'un partage du pouvoir entre l'Afrique du Sud et le Maroc entre 2017 et 2019 (Issekin, 2022a). Le changement du cahier de charges de la CAN lors du symposium de Rabat par le décret

du 20 juillet 2017 de la CAF, use ensuite du droit pour affecter le sport power camerounais des stades. L'augmentation du nombre d'équipes participant à la compétition (de 16 à 24 équipes) met en agenda, l'idée d'un retrait de la compétition dans l'opinion publique.

L'annonce du retrait de la CAN 2019 au Cameroun le 30 novembre 2018, suite aux retards dans l'aménagement des infrastructures, résulte des échanges politiques contradictoires entre le Renouveau et la CAF (Issekin, 2020). Elle coïncide avec l'annonce du lancement d'un processus Désarmement-Démobilisation-Réintégration(DDR) dans le pays, après une victoire du RDPC à l'élection présidentielle d'octobre 2018 où le PNDIS a été une ressource électorale décisive par ses grands travaux. Ce renouvellement de la coopération avec la CAF s'illustre par les visites régulières de ses représentants sur les chantiers, au Premier Ministère et à la Présidence de la République, avant un ajournement de la CAN en 2021 sans une application des sanctions prévues par ses textes.

Des opérations informationnelles (André, 2022) (mésinformation, désinformation et informations orientées) vis-à-vis de la CAN camerounaise, alimentent d'autres risques nationaux liés à la complexité socio-politique(Belhoste, 2020). L'aménagement des stades traversant les cycles électoraux entre 2006 et 2025, éprouve la solidité d'un système géopolitique RDPC. L'accueil des compétitions liées aux grandes ambitions du Renouveau, le contraint à contrôler tous les échelons de pouvoir pour parachever ces aménagements, tout en tirant toutes les dividendes électorales face à des oppositions enracinées localement. On peut dans ce cas, se demander si une alternance politique nationale infléchira les politiques de développement des stades, à l'exemple du gel des projets d'aménagement des stades municipaux ambitionnant d'intégrer les stades de la CAN à Ngoumou ou à Bafang, suite à des alternances locales des exécutifs RDPC.

L'enchevêtrement et la complexité de l'organigramme de l'aménagement des stades révèlent un autre risque national. Il est lié aux rivalités entre le Comité national de préparation des coupes d'Afrique des nations de football 2016 et 2019(COMPIP) (2014), la *Task force* (2016) et le Comité d'Organisation Local du Championnat d'Afrique des Nations de Football "CHAN TOTAL 2020" et de la "Coupe d'Afrique des Nations de Football" CAN TOTAL 2021(COCAN) (2019). Logées respectivement au Premier Ministère, à la Présidence de la République et au Ministère des Sports, ces institutions mobilisent trois représentations concurrentes pour produire des rapports de force à leur avantage, dans une compétition politique au sein du Renouveau à l'ombre des cycles électoraux passés et à venir(Issekin, 2022b).

La *Task Force* du Secrétaire Général de la Présidence de la République invoque l'efficacité pour parachever l'aménagement des infrastructures sportives avant la tenue des compétitions dans ses stratégies de communication. Par contre, les blocages administratifs et financiers autour des complexes de Japoma et d'Olembé relayés dans la presse nationale et internationale et attribués au Ministre des Finances, Louis Paul Motazé, correspondent à la transparence. Ces discours austères quant à la réduction des financements de ces chantiers majeurs de la CAN retournent à la "rigueur" et à la "moralisation" pour relancer la lutte contre la corruption chère au Renouveau. La visite inopinée des infrastructures sportives du site de Garoua par Joseph Dion Ngute, au détour de l'inauguration d'une cimenterie dans la région du Nord en octobre 2021, exprime la légitimité dans la conduite des projets d'aménagement. Le Premier Ministre souhaite remettre le

COMIP CAN 20-21 au cœur de la gouvernance territoriale des projets sportifs, avant de mettre en scène sa loyauté au Président Biya.

Les conflits d'aménagement des stades révèlent également une géopolitique interne au service des géopolitiques locales. Pluriels, ils dépassent la localisation des risques terroristes et sanitaires liés au "réveil des crises camerounaises" (Morelle & Owona Nguini, 2018) et à la baisse de la popularité de la CAN résultant du protocole sanitaire CAF-COCAN-MINSANTÉ. Des conflits d'aménagement menacés traitent d'abord du maintien d'un aménagement sportif lié à la CAN sur un territoire donné (Paquet, 2020). Le retard du PNDIS entre 2008 et 2022 suite à la raréfaction des financements, gèle ponctuellement les aménagements concernés par son second volet. La baisse des financements américains qui affecte la rénovation de Roumdé Adjia et l'aménagement des stades d'entraînement et des hôtels à Garoua, est compensée par d'autres financements marocains.

La CAN en sa notoriété, génère aussi deux sous-types de conflits d'aménagement convoités. Le premier sous-type de conflit concerne des rivalités entre et au sein des régions autour de la détermination des sites de la CAN. Le site de Buea-Limbé est un compromis entre ces deux villes du Fako, après le choix gouvernemental d'aménager dans le cadre du PNDIS, un stade à Limbé au détriment de la puissante Kumba. Le second et dernier sous-type de conflit traite des rivalités autour du contenu et du rythme des aménagements. L'arbitrage du pouvoir central détermine quels sont les aménagements prioritaires sur les sites de la CAN. Les discussions entre le Ministère des sports et *Yeningün* à Japoma sur le financement des emprises routières autour du complexe, intègrent cette configuration conflictuelle liée à l'augmentation du coût du mégaprojet.

Les enjeux de ces conflits locaux ouvrent à deux grandes perspectives au service du maintien et de la création des systèmes géopolitiques locaux (Subra, 2016, p.261) proches du pouvoir et des oppositions. Les stades devenus vecteurs des micronationalismes régionaux, participent aux affirmations identitaires des régions refusant un Cameroun sportif à deux vitesses exprimé par la géographie des sites de la CAN. Ce refus est traduit par des trois principaux pôles géopolitiques anglophones, sudistes et nordistes. Ceux-ci deviennent des théâtres des revendications ethnorégionales symbolisées par des tensions autour des stades entre des villes perçues comme des centres sportifs de ces aires géoculturelles et d'autres villes périphériques.

Un champ de batailles (Hulbert, 2009) entre le *Nation branding* descendant et les *City(ies) branding* ascendants pendant la CAN (Tichaawa & Hemmonsby, 2022), révèle des contre-récits locaux (Roe, 1994) critiques des récits étatiques dominants sur les stades. Ces oppositions en ville traitent d'abord des refus des pouvoirs locaux de reproduire les caractéristiques nationales sur les sites de la CAN érigés en territoires au sein des municipalités contre leurs spécificités locales. L'installation de la fan zone de la commune de Yaoundé 1^{er} auprès du complexe d'Olembé est une stratégie opportuniste (Hautbois & Desbordes, 2011) visant à drainer à son avantage, la visibilité de ce territoire pour le rayonnement de sa mairie.

Cette géopolitique urbaine intègre aussi des rivalités entre les *cities branding* (Dubinsky, 2021) autour des stades. Renvoyant aux stratégies et manœuvres de réappropriation des stades par des villes et communes, ces luttes utilisent des chiffres liés au supporterisme ou encore au nombre de matchs accueillis par les arènes des villes concernées dans ces batailles. Garoua s'affirme

comme la capitale nationale du football par l'affluence à Roundé Adjia, pour contester la concentration des matchs des Lions Indomptables à Yaoundé et à Douala.

Les rivalités entre des collectivités décentralisées au sein des sites, remettent quant à elles en cause, l'unanimité affichée par les comités de sites. Elles usent des représentations géopolitiques d'homogénéité, d'hétérogénéité et d'unité territoriale (Vieillard-Coffre, 2001). La volonté de Bandjoun et de Bafang, des chefs-lieux départementaux du Koung Khi et du Haut Nkam, de mettre en avant leurs stades d'entraînements, remet en cause une régionalisation illusoire du city branding autour de Bafoussam à l'Ouest. Par contre, le refus d'attribuer le nom "Fako" au site de Buea-Limbé a pour enjeu, un détachement d'une identité départementale étatique au profit par un naming composite symbolisant une coopération entre ces deux villes dans la région à statut spécial du Sud-Ouest.

3.2. La géopolitique de la nation contre les pratiques sélectives camerounaises

Les politiques sélectives au sein des Lions Indomptables confirment au cours de la CAN 2021, qu'elles peuvent aussi affaiblir le mythe d'homogénéité de la sélection nationale (Poli, 2006a) par une autre identité nationale segmentée. Ce mythe discrimine d'abord les « binationaux » face aux nationaux dans l'application du droit à la nationalité du décret de 2014. Son article 7 juridicise un "nationalisme des nationalistes" (Liotard, 1997) tendant à conserver une "pureté nationale" au service du football camerounais.

Cette discrimination prend aussi la forme d'une incapacité à pouvoir intégrer ces binationaux dans les cohortes des sélections inférieures par la fixation des quotas de joueurs dans ces catégories (Bekombo, 2021). Cette politique des corps (Manirakiza, 2017) tend à réduire le spectre des pratiques sélectives camerounaises au service d'une géopolitique de la nation. Elle traduit un échec des stratégies de réintégration des expatriés et des binationaux (Poli, 2006a) pour la CAN. "Youssoupha Moukoko et Evan Ndicka ont respectivement choisi les sélections allemande et ivoirienne à cause de notre incapacité à les réintégrer" (diplomate, 37 ans).

Le dilemme du choix du Cameroun pour ces joueurs expatriés fragilise également ces logiques géopolitiques de la sélection au service de l'unité nationale (Issekin, 2021). Au cours de la compétition, l'opinion publique locale véhicule des critiques vis-à-vis de certains joueurs expatriés quant à leur refus à jouer avec le Cameroun. Ces critiques traitent aussi des logiques opportunistes (Poli, 2006a) et clientélistes quant au choix des Lions Indomptables pour voir augmenter leur valeur marchande, et par là, s'ouvrir d'autres perspectives de carrière (Poli, 2006b). Qualifiés de "Ndolè" et de "tomates", certains joueurs sont accusés "de marchander leurs places chez les Lions pour trouver des clubs" (fonctionnaire, entraîneur, 35 ans).

Les logiques identitaires affectent également les expatriés dans leur choix d'évoluer pour le Cameroun. Ils sont accusés de ne pas avoir des liens solides avec le pays pour prétendre devenir des Lions Indomptables. L'élimination du Cameroun aux tirs aux buts par l'Égypte en demi-finale illustre ces critiques vis-à-vis des expatriés: "Harold Moukoudi a raté son tir aux buts où Franck Zambo Anguissa a fui cette épreuve, après sa CAN médiocre marquée son jeu suffisant en sélection !!!" (journaliste, 54 ans).

Le retour du nationalisme des nationalistes (Liotard, 1997) affecte en outre le sélectionneur Antonio Conceição. Le Portugais est qualifié de “coach étranger” qui “n’a rien prouvé” et qui cherche à “se faire un nom” avec le Cameroun. Les revendications d’un sélectionneur national comme expressions d’une fragilité des apports des pratiques sélectives sur la géopolitique de la nation, aboutissent à la nomination de l’ancien capitaine des Lions Indomptables Rigobert Song en février 2022.

Les conflits entre les Lions Indomptables et leurs clubs étrangers (Poli, 2006b) intègrent aussi ces limites de la géopolitique de la nation. Des clubs européens et asiatiques ont retardé la venue de certains internationaux pour la CAN2021 (Issekin, 2022b) sous le Covid-19. La saillance de ces protestations routinières quant au positionnement de la compétition entre janvier et février est impulsée par un sport power qatari médiatisé par la présidence de l’European Clubs Association par Nasser El Khelaïfi. Le président du *Paris Saint Germain* exige des garanties de la CAF et du Cameroun quant à la protection des joueurs contre le Covid-19. Aurelio de Laurentiis, président du *Napoli* menace aussi de se passer des joueurs africains s’ils ne renoncent pas à participer à la CAN. L’arrivée de certains joueurs des clubs européens une semaine avant la compétition, croise leur “retenue” sur le terrain. “S’imposer face à ses dirigeants prouve qu’on valorise le Cameroun par rapport à son club” (ex international camerounais, 58 ans).

Le culte du champion national (Liotard, 1997) affecte enfin les pratiques sélectives camerounaises sur deux plans. Les victoires des Lions Indomptables au cours de la CAN2021, laissent apparaître un clivage entre expatriés et binationaux par le classement des buteurs. Vincent Aboubakar incarne les succès d’une formation camerounaise des joueurs, en terminant meilleur buteur de la compétition avec 8 buts en 7 matchs. Karl Toko Ekambi, second meilleur buteur de la CAN (5 buts en 7 matchs) illustre un succès relatif des politiques de réintégration des expatriés. Cependant, les sorties de ces deux joueurs après la défaite face à l’Égypte (JO, 2022), révèlent d’autres rivalités géopolitiques entre ces deux segments en sélection.

Un clivage lié au rejaillissement des identités ethnorégionales émerge des victoires et des défaites du Cameroun (Anafack, 2016). Les parures et les stigmates ethniques se (dé)construisent en liant les succès et des défaites de l’équipe nationale aux communautés incarnées (Fleury et al., 2016) par les joueurs décisifs. Les “Nordistes” se charismatisent par les exploits de Vincent Aboubakar où les performances décriées d’Um Gwet alimentent les critiques d’une “équipe nationale des Bassa”.

2.3. Les cérémonies de la CAN et des élections à la FECAFOOT : des dispositifs rituels élargis dépassés par une identité nationale segmentée

Les phénomènes d’usure autour de l’appel sous le drapeau sont les premières limites connues aux cérémonies sportives autour de la CAN. La méconnaissance de leurs dimensions identitaires surgit d’abord. Le caractère unitaire des rituels reste plus ou moins méconnu malgré la télédiffusion des spectacles. En dépit de la présence massive des populations à Olembé, la CAN est d’abord perçue comme une compétition internationale : “ce n’est pas la Coupe du Cameroun” (Coach sportif, 30 ans). Ce sentiment national est tout aussi diffus au sujet des élections à la

FECAFOOT : certaines personnes se demandent pourquoi est-ce qu’elles sont télédiffusées sur la CRTV. “Sommes-nous des électeurs à la FECAFOOT ?” (Étudiant, 22 ans).



Fig 5. Images de la propagande du PCRN autour de son président Cabral Libii pendant la CAN
 (https://www.facebook.com/100023078499730/posts/pfbid0UKx97TXhn1e3MQH8u545Suy287mJ8dU93ard3AsymrVzBVBpNPdDgVoT4wYdEXWrl/?app=fbl)

La solidarité au gouvernement est en revanche aisément perceptible dans les discours hostiles à la CAN. Ceux-ci critiquent l’idée même de la tenue de la compétition pendant qu’il y a des crises séantes dans le pays, avant d’utiliser les stades comme vitrines contre le Renouveau. “Si je rentre au stade, je vais afficher mes messages de soutien aux Anglophones” (entrepreneur, 35 ans, militant du MRC). Sous un ton plus nuancé, des figures d’opposition interrogent la transparence financière dans l’aménagement des stades. Elles s’y rendent aussi pour travailler leur proximité avec les populations (figure 5). Les élections à la FECAFOOT sont également perçues comme un soutien au gouvernement. Ses principaux protagonistes sont identifiés à des soutiens actifs de la réélection du président Paul Biya en 2018. “Qu’est-ce que je gagne à voir des *sardinards* se disputer pour la FECAFOOD ?” (Commerçant, 45 ans, militant du MRC). Les politiciens insistent, par contre, sur la nécessité gouvernementale à écouter le “peuple” s’exprimer à travers ce processus électoral.

L’ambiguïté des phénomènes symboliques (Issekin, 2018) condense ensuite des limites des rituels unitaires. La fluidité symbolique relativise d’abord la diffusion de la grammaire unitaire à partir d’Olembé et du Mont Fébé. Le choix d’Olembé pour diffuser un message autour de l’unité du

Cameroun au cours de la CAN2021 est critiqué. Les stades de Douala et de Limbé proches du Nord-Ouest et du Sud-Ouest en crise, reviennent dans certains discours citoyens. Ils mettent en scène, une sécurisation de ces territoires et une représentativité de l'anglophonie identitaire par la revendication d'une tenue de la cérémonie d'ouverture de la CAN dans ces villes. Les discours autour de l'alternance saillissent aussi à Olembé. La projection 3D d'un Lion est interprétée comme une symbolique de l'alternance à la tête de l'État au Cameroun en 2025. "Le lion là, c'est le *Nnom Ngui* ! Il va partir comme il est arrivé, en faisant le tour du pays comme son "totem" a fait le tour du stade avant de s'en aller"(vendeur à la sauvette, 29 ans).



Fig 6. Correspondance du Secrétaire Général de la Présidence de la République au sujet du championnat national de football
(<https://www.facebook.com/105854551546277/posts/pfbid02vJigyniyCgBLU7H3f85MnenN7GJKgeigqy5dwR2bpegVz94r1XSC5RuTTVP61iVol/?app=fbl>)

Si la stigmatisation d'une "FECAFOOT des Bassa" tend à se s'imposer dans les discours en ligne critiques de la gouvernance Eto'o Fils, Guibaï Gatama, journaliste et membre du comité exécutif de cette organisation, reprend le clivage géopolitique lié à un effet Sud-Nord de la géographie des sites de la CAN, pour accuser le président de la FECAFOOT de marginaliser les "Nordistes" dans l'organisation des play-offs du championnat, en affaiblissant le Coton Sport de Garoua, l'équipe phare du Nord Cameroun (Fosso, 2022).

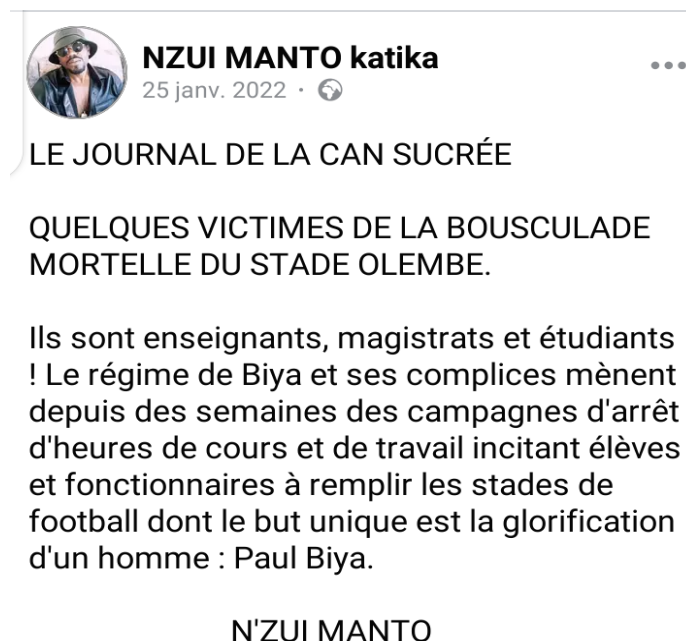


Fig 7. Capture illustrant la défiance vis-à-vis du Renouveau par N'zui Manto, un vigilant numérique après l'accident d'Olembé du 26 janvier 2022

(<https://www.facebook.com/110125684824949/posts/pfbid02qZxsqsq1RXk78yVkhUHWqkGqtmXns7isp71j3BPmSd1gVQ2Rg4BYvmonhvGUSpuUl/?app=fbl>)

Il est soutenu après sa sortie sur ses réseaux sociaux, par plusieurs dignitaires du football originaires du nord et de l'ouest du pays liés à la gouvernance précédente de Seydou Mbombo Njoya.

La Présidence de la République ordonne à la FECAFOOT, une réintégration de Garoua dans le calendrier de la compétition (figure 6) pour résoudre ce conflit d'aménagement convoité autour des play-offs. Elle confirme une "récréation patronnée" (Njoya, 2007) des élections générales accentuant encore plus les tensions identitaires entre les football professionnel et amateur, mais surtout entre les régions. Cette logique se poursuit dans la dimension géopolitique des rapports entre l'État, la FECAFOOT et les collectivités locales autour de l'aménagement et l'administration des stades.

Ces rituels cérémoniaires et électoraux autour de la CAN ont enfin exposé les limites d'une manipulation politique des symboles unitaires. Leur caractère transpartisan et apolitique est déconstruit par des citoyens. La parade militaire, les chants en l'honneur du président Biya et la présence d'un protocole orienté autour de lui, sont perçus comme des liturgies politiques en l'honneur du Renouveau. Le toponyme attribué au complexe d'Olembé est aussi identifié à une ruse politicienne. Des réflexions ironisent sur le refus de baptiser le stade au nom du président de la République. Elles le présentent une volonté présidentielle de ne pas s'identifier à un projet non achevé. "Je croyais que c'était le stade Paul Biya : donc le père a refusé de donner son nom au stade ?" (Femme, psychopédagogue, 33 ans). Mieux, le maintien de la finale de la CAN à Olembé après l'accident du 26 janvier 2022 en marge du match Cameroun-Comores, est

interprété sous les langages de l'invisible dans le football (Schatzberg, 2000). Pour ces discours, la cérémonie d'ouverture de la CAN augurait une séquence sacrificielle déguisée sous la forme d'un accident ce 26 janvier 2022 (figure 7).

« Mathias Eric Owona Nguini leur réel projet: Construire « une société vertueuse » et non la FECAFOOT. Les « challenges plus importants que le football (Education emploi santé infrastructures accès à l'eau potable électricité...) » c'est un projet de société rien à voir avec le football. Il écrit : « nous sommes convaincus que le Liberia n'est pas le Cameroun ». Au Liberia où le footballeur Weah est devenu président alors il y a la crainte que Eto'o rêve de faire autant. Voilà ce que j'ai compris. Ils avancent masqués par le football ⚽. Il faut lire la diatribe de Abdouramane qui met l'accent tactiquement sur le tribalisme et l'appellation Mouton 🐑 stratégiquement pour fédérer nos frères du nord autour de la victimisation et de la surenchère politique pour avoir plus dans le partage du gâteau national. Le football et la FECAFOOT sont utilisés ici comme cheval de Troie pour atteindre Etooudi. Voilà le projet masqué derrière ces agitations.>>

Fig 8. Analyse en ligne sur les imputations des ambitions présidentielles à Samuel Eto'o

(<https://www.facebook.com/1577053051/posts/pfbid0cfSRa1msosa4FHck7xa8aELQJFVaiyon6M3mP4eY1S6zXidCRjV1yNqkehivQE9EI/?app=fbl>)

De même, les élections générales à la FECAFOOT sont considérées sous l'angle d'une politisation du Renouveau. Selon ces discours, ce processus électoral a été surdéterminé par la Présidence de la République, suite aux enjeux réputationnels charriés en période d'impopularité de l'exécutif à mi-mandat entre 2018 et 2025. Ce sont surtout des discours autour de l'instrumentalisation de ces élections générales pour préparer l'alternance politique au Cameroun, qui apparaissent comme la plus forte imputation d'une manipulation politique. En dépit d'un démenti sur France 24 en 2024 (Perelman, 2024), Samuel Eto'o est constamment accusé par ses détracteurs en ligne, de préparer une candidature à l'élection présidentielle à venir au Cameroun. Ils interprètent ainsi son périple national à travers des chefferies des 10 régions avant son élection à la FECAFOOT (figure 8). Cette multipositionnalité entre le sport et le politique perçue comme une légitimation déambulatoire, lui permettra de contrôler des ressources humaines et financières de la FECAFOOT pour les reconvertir en ressources électorales.

4. Conclusion

Le *Cameroon Branding* de la CAN 2021 par le Renouveau Sportif a permis de concentrer l'attention du monde entier sur le pays entre janvier et février 2022. Ses stades, ses Lions Indomptables et ses liturgies politiques ont été mis à contribution pour poursuivre une étatisation multiscale du

Cameroun. Ces lieux conflictuels de représentation du football se sont affirmés comme des scènes de cette étatisation, avant d'en révéler les crises. Cette géopolitique plurielle relativise donc l'efficacité d'une étatisation multiscalaire du Renouveau Sportif. Cette culture politique partisane instrumentalisant les stratégies étatiques d'images par le sport, est susceptible de se reproduire autour d'autres méga événements sportifs à venir pour perpétuer des pouvoirs établis, suite à la multiplication des conflits autour de l'attraction des compétitions sportives en Afrique et dans le monde.

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La diplomazia sportiva dell'Azerbaigian e le relazioni con l'Unione Europea

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Abstract

Questo contributo si concentra sulla particolare dinamica socio-politica del mondo sportivo della Repubblica dell'Azerbaigian, il quale partecipa alle competizioni europee pur trovandosi geograficamente in Asia, con un focus sull'influenza dei mega-eventi nelle relazioni con l'Unione Europea. L'Azerbaigian, essendo un paese transcontinentale e multiculturale, negli ultimi anni ha utilizzato strategicamente l'infrastruttura sportiva per rafforzare il proprio potere diplomatico. Partendo dalle considerazioni di diversi studiosi, da dichiarazioni ufficiali e da interviste realizzate ad alcuni attori chiave, l'articolo mira ad approfondire il contesto storico dell'integrazione dell'Azerbaigian nello sport europeo. Nello specifico, vengono ripercorse le tappe fondamentali che hanno elevato sullo scacchiere internazionale la visibilità di un'area geografica ancora poco dibattuta, esplorando il ruolo giocato dallo sport sullo sfondo dei processi di cooperazione, da un alto, ma anche dell'organizzazione politica interna al paese, dall'altro.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Diplomazia sportiva, Politica europea, Relazioni internazionali, Unione Europea.

1. Introduzione: il rapporto tra sport, politica, diplomazia

Prima di approfondire in che modo la Repubblica dell'Azerbaigian¹ utilizza lo sport per rafforzare la cooperazione politica con l'UE, al fine di una comprensione migliore è necessario inquadrare storicamente la relazione tra politica, mega-eventi sportivi e diplomazia. A tal proposito, non si può non citare lo studio del politologo Stuart Murray (2018) che fin dalla prime righe di "Sports Diplomacy" fa notare come, sin dall'antichità, lo sport ha avuto una funzione "oltre il gioco", venendo spesso sfruttato dalle élite dominanti. Tra i primi esempi rientrano chiaramente i Giochi olimpici – iniziati nel 776 a.C. e aboliti nel 394 d.C. – caratterizzati dalla cosiddetta Tregua Olimpica, quando il conflitto tra le città-stato greche veniva sublimato a garanzia della protezione

¹ Per quanto molti utilizzino anche in italiano la dicitura Azerbaijan con la "j", in questo testo si userà la dicitura Azerbaigian con la "gi" italiana, oltre a prediligere l'aggettivo "azerbaigiano" rispetto al meno preciso "azero", come preferito dalle istituzioni diplomatiche del paese stesso (cfr. Ambasciata della Repubblica dell'Azerbaigian, <https://rome.mfa.gov.az/it>).

degli atleti, degli spettatori e degli ufficiali durante i viaggi *verso* e *da* il luogo delle competizioni. Infatti, in periodo di “*Ekecheiria*” – la parola che rappresentava la personificazione della pace degli dèi – alle persone era consentito viaggiare in sicurezza anche attraverso territori nemici. Le antiche Olimpiadi, dunque, trascendevano le rivalità militari e le differenze politiche, mettendo sullo stesso piano Atene, Sparta e le altre civiltà della Ellade.

In epoca moderna gli eventi sportivi sono stati spesso utilizzati per finalità ideologiche: possiamo portare ad esempio i Giochi olimpici di Berlino 1936 – usati come mezzo di propaganda da parte del regime nazista che esclude gli ebrei e i rom dalle gare – la Coppa del mondo di calcio del 1938 – dove il regime fascista fece indossare divise nere ai giocatori della nazionale italiana e li obbligò a fare il saluto romano – oppure i boicottaggi delle Olimpiadi durante la guerra fredda – ad esempio a Mosca nel 1980 da parte degli Stati Uniti e a Los Angeles nel 1984 da parte dell’URSS. Il mega-evento può anche servire per mandare messaggi politici/diplomatici; un esempio recente è l’esclusione degli atleti russi e bielorussi dalle principali manifestazioni sportive internazionali (Bastianon, 2023) – tuttavia riabilitati per partecipare a Parigi 2024 sotto bandiera neutra, al fine di rispettare in una certa maniera il presupposto principio di neutralità dello sport (Santoro, 2023). Oltre alle nazioni, possiamo trovare delle Organizzazioni non governative che usano utilizzano lo sport per sensibilizzare l’opinione pubblica sulle questioni sociali – come The European Sports NGO – e ovviamente le organizzazioni sportive internazionali – come la FIFA – attori altamente visibili che permettono allo sport di svolgere un ruolo importante nelle relazioni internazionali tra stati, attori non statali e persone in tutto il mondo. Così come la musica e le arti visuali, anche lo sport è un linguaggio universale dove non vengono pronunciate parole e, come tale, può superare l’acrimonia nelle relazioni politiche. Le competizioni sportive possono generare occasioni di dialogo di alto profilo lontano dal tavolo delle negoziazioni formali e, quindi, possono costruire un ponte tra le nazioni e i popoli (Murray, 2018).

Emblematica, a tal riguardo, è l’esperienza della Coppa del Mondo di Rugby del 1995, svoltasi nel Sudafrica appena uscito dall’apartheid. Lo storico Albert Grundlingh (1998) riporta che il primo punto dell’agenda del neopresidente Nelson Mandela fosse il superamento delle divisioni interne e dei pregiudizi razziali di matrice coloniale. Mandela era consapevole che un evento sportivo avrebbe appassionato e unito le popolazioni del Sudafrica, indipendentemente dai conflitti passati, dallo status sociale o dal colore della pelle. La scena del presidente che, dopo la storica vittoria sui temutissimi All Blacks, passeggia per il campo dell’Ellis Park di Johannesburg indossando la maglietta della nazionale di rugby è diventata parte dell’immaginario collettivo, a dimostrazione che, come detto nel famosissimo discorso di Mandela (2000) ai Laureus Award,

lo sport ha il potere di cambiare il mondo. Ha il potere di ispirare, di unire le persone in una maniera che pochi di noi possono fare. Parla ai giovani in un linguaggio che loro capiscono. Lo sport ha il potere di creare speranza dove c’è disperazione. È più potente dei governi nel rompere le barriere razziali, è capace di ridere in faccia a tutte le discriminazioni.

D’altro canto, Murray (2018) fa notare che l’utilizzo politico dello sport può avere anche un lato oscuro e potrebbe essere usato con fini sciovinisti. È il caso della Tragedia dei Giochi di Monaco del 1972 – quando un commando dell’organizzazione terroristica Settembre Nero assaltò la delegazione olimpica israeliana con il risultato finale di diciassette morti tra terroristi, atleti israeliani e forze dell’ordine tedesche – ottenendo come risposta la cosiddetta “Operazione Ira di

Dio” da parte del Mossad; una campagna di spionaggio protrattasi per oltre venti anni che ha finito per alimentare il conflitto israelo-palestinese fino al giorno d’oggi.

Altra faccia oscura della medaglia è il desiderio di un paese di primeggiare ad ogni costo per mostrarsi temibile sul palcoscenico internazionale: il rapporto indipendente del 2016 commissionato dal WADA, l’Agenzia Mondiale Antidoping, ha rilevato come più di mille atleti della Russia, di oltre trenta sport, avessero beneficiato del doping di stato tra il 2011 e il 2015, con la complicità di medici, allenatori e addirittura i servizi segreti (McLaren, 2016, pp. 10-18). Oppure, nel caso delle Paralimpiadi di Sydney nel 2000, si scoprì che nella nazionale spagnola di basket maschile per atleti con disabilità mentali ben dieci su dodici giocatori erano normodotati. A dire il vero, negli anni ci sono stati diversi scandali riguardanti corruzioni, comportamenti non etici e transazioni finanziarie sospette (Kihl, Skinner & Engelberg, 2017). Questi ultimi sono troppi per essere elencati tutti, ma possiamo citarne un paio tra i più famosi: i regali che alcuni membri del CIO hanno ricevuto dal Salt Lake Organizing Committee durante la selezione della sede per le Olimpiadi invernali del 2002 – poi vinta appunto da Salt Lake City (Mallon, 2000) – o le sospensioni per corruzione dell’allora presidente della FIFA Joseph Blatter e del suo omologo della UEFA Michel Platini del 2015 (Hylton, 2017).

2. Il concetto di diplomazia sportiva

Il complesso ruolo che i mega-eventi sportivi giocano sia nella vita nazionale che internazionale di un paese ha di conseguenza prodotto un’ampia gamma di ricerche da parte di, tra i tanti, sociologi, filosofi, giuristi, studiosi di sicurezza, pace e sviluppo. Tuttavia, Stuart Murray (2018) fa presente che molta meno attenzione è stata dedicata alla “diplomazia sportiva”: un tema trasversale alle suddette discipline. Infatti, nel mondo accademico sono sempre esistite analisi e riflessioni a partire da casi studio importanti – tra i più noti, oltre al già citato ruolo della Coppa del Mondo di Rugby nel Sudafrica dell’apartheid (Keech & Houlihan, 1999), merita un riferimento la “diplomazia del ping-pong” cinese del 1971 (Chang, 2004). Ciononostante, il politologo britannico sostiene che queste interpretazioni tendono a riproporre descrizioni storiografiche e prospettive teoriche che, per quanto interessanti, non si distinguono molto dai *framework* più generali applicati negli studi dello sport e delle relazioni internazionali. Anche le menzioni ad aree affascinanti della ricerca sulla diplomazia, per quanto suggestive, non forniscono specifici approfondimenti rispetto alla “diplomazia sportiva”.

Ebbene, nell’accezione più descrittiva, si può affermare che la diplomazia sportiva si riferisce ad una pratica antica: l’uso dello sport per realizzare obiettivi, minimizzare i conflitti, avvicinare popoli che abitano luoghi distanti. Più precisamente, può essere definita come l’uso cosciente e strategico di atleti ed eventi sportivi da parte di attori statali e non statali per coinvolgere, informare e creare un’immagine favorevole tra gli osservatori e le organizzazioni straniere, per plasmare le loro percezioni in modo più o meno conforme agli obiettivi della nazione di riferimento (Murray & Pigman, 2014).

Da questo punto di vista, riprendendo un altro politologo, Michal Kobierecki (2020; 2023), il concetto di diplomazia sportiva presenta punti di contatto con la nozione di *soft power* come intesa da Joseph Nye (1990; 2004; 2008): un concetto adottato per sottolineare che una nazione può

talvolta raggiungere i suoi obiettivi su scala internazionale senza ricorrere a pressioni, coercizione o a scambi economici – il più evidente e concettualmente contrapposto “potere duro”. Di fatto, potrebbe “semplicemente” ispirare altri stati a seguire la sua strada suscitando ammirazione per i valori che rappresenta, spingendo ad emularne l’esempio o aspirando al suo livello di prosperità e apertura in qualche campo specifico. Detto con Nye (2004, p. 5) il *soft power* consiste “nel far desiderare agli altri di raggiungere i risultati a cui miri tu”. La gamma degli strumenti con cui si esercita questo tipo di potere orientato al consenso è molto vasta e include praticamente tutto al di fuori degli asset economici e militari (Wilson, 2008). A grandi linee, si può dire che faccia leva su elementi più propriamente “civilizzati” come riti collettivi, media, ideologia e istituzioni (Kobierecki, 2023).

Dunque, è anche mutuando le riflessioni sul *soft power* che l’utilizzo dei mega-eventi sportivi per plasmare la percezione internazionale di uno stato ha portato a coniare il termine “diplomazia sportiva”. A sua volta, la diplomazia sportiva può essere articolata in quattro dimensioni teoriche più specifiche: la *diplomazia sportiva tradizionale* – cioè l’uso dello sport per promuovere gli obiettivi di politica estera di un dato stato; la *diplomazia specializzata degli attori sportivi non statali* – che riguarda gli organismi sportivi che si impegnano in processi diplomatici; l’*anti-diplomazia sportiva* – la separazione delle persone e degli stati con l’uso dello sport; infine, la *nuova diplomazia sportiva* – una diplomazia che include attività di partnership pubblico-privato (Murray, 2018). In questo modo, il termine consente di indagare il rapporto tra manifestazioni sportive, l’immagine internazionale degli stati e la loro natura “multi-stakeholder” (Pamment, 2016; Hocking, 2005, p. 13) aprendo le porte a quello che Geoffrey Pigman (2016, p. 5) definisce “nuovo paradigma degli studi diplomatici: una nuova modalità per analizzare come uno stato possa usare uno strumento, quale lo sport, in maniera più efficace di altri mezzi per promuovere se stesso sul palcoscenico internazionale”.

3. L’Azerbaigian e l’Europa

Nell’incipit di “Ali e Nino”, il romanzo di Kurban Said (2013) associato all’Azerbaigian e considerato uno dei più importanti del XX secolo, emerge la coesistenza di un’identità nazionale che abbraccia sia aspetti territoriali che simbolici, sia occidentali che orientali, offrendo spazi per scelte e mediazioni politiche e culturali. L’autore inizia il racconto con la frase emblematica di un insegnante rivolta ai suoi studenti: “Possiamo dire, bambini, che è nostra responsabilità decidere se Baku appartenga all’Europa progressista o all’Asia reazionaria” (Said, 2013, p. 43). Questa ambiguità territoriale, ovvero l’appartenenza sia all’Europa che all’Asia, che dal punto di vista geografico non può essere risolta in modo netto, diventa per le élite dell’Azerbaigian un elemento di duplice appartenenza che abbraccia entrambe le identità e i riferimenti culturali ad esse collegati (Ismayilov, 2012; Pommier Vincelli, 2018, p. 180) facendo sì che le autorità governative sfruttino selettivamente questa ambivalenza per rafforzare l’agenda politica del momento (van Gils, 2020, p. 12-43.).

Tralasciando il tentativo democratico del 1918-1920, la Repubblica dell’Azerbaigian è ufficialmente nata il 30 agosto 1991, data in cui ha dichiarato la propria indipendenza dopo 69 anni passati come parte dell’Unione Sovietica. Il paese ha subito iniziato un processo di

ricostruzione nazionale e di ridefinizione della propria posizione nella comunità internazionale, stabilendo una politica estera multivettoriale, mirando a relazioni amichevoli con la maggior parte dei vicini e le grandi potenze mondiali (Cornell, 2011; van Gils, 2020).

Il primo Accordo di Partenariato e Cooperazione tra l'Azerbaigian e l'Unione Europea è stato firmato nel 1996, entrando in vigore nel 1999 e riaffermato nel 2018, seguito dalla Politica Europea di Vicinato nel 2004 e del Partenariato Orientale nel 2009. Per quanto riguarda la partecipazione in trattati e/o istituzioni inerenti i rapporti con l'UE, nel 1992, l'Azerbaigian è entrato a far parte della Banca europea per la ricostruzione e lo sviluppo e della Conferenza sulla sicurezza e sulla cooperazione in Europa – diventata nel 1995 Organizzazione per la Sicurezza e la Cooperazione in Europa (OSCE) – a seguito della firma avvenuta due anni prima del CFE Treaty, ossia il trattato per la riduzione e la limitazione delle forze armate convenzionali in Europa. Nel 1994 ha firmato il Partenariato per la pace con la NATO, ovvero il programma finalizzato a creare fiducia tra i paesi del Patto Atlantico, gli Stati europei non aderenti ad esso e le nazioni dell'ex URSS; dal 1997 fa parte del Partenariato Euro-Atlantico, il forum internazionale di coordinamento, consultazione e dialogo su questioni politiche e di sicurezza tra i paesi NATO e un gruppo di stati europei e asiatici che non ne sono membri; infine dal 2001 è membro del Consiglio d'Europa, l'organizzazione dedicata a promuovere la democrazia, i diritti umani, l'identità culturale europea e la ricerca di soluzioni ai problemi sociali dei paesi membri. Tramite esso, fa quindi parte della Corte Europea dei Diritti dell'Uomo (van Gils, 2020, pp. 117-140).

Oltre ai meri accordi nero su bianco, bisogna tener conto anche del fatto che l'Azerbaigian, come molti paesi situati al confine tra Europa e Asia, ha una complessa identità culturale e geopolitica che ne influenza la auto-percezione in relazione all'Europa. Soprattutto, grazie alla sua ricca storia che include influenze culturali e storiche sia dall'Europa che dall'Asia – essendo stato sia parte dell'Impero persiano che di quello russo e poi dell'URSS – il territorio è diventato un crocevia di culture e civiltà. Basti pensare che, nonostante sia un paese dove la maggior delle persone si dichiara di fede musulmana sciita, l'articolo 48 della costituzione configura la Repubblica come uno stato laico che tutela la libertà di culto e in tutto il diritto pubblico non vi è traccia di riferimenti alla *sharia* (Swietochowski, 2002; Valiyev, 2005, Wistrand, 2012). Un altro indicatore di multiculturalità è il fatto che la maggior parte della popolazione è capace di leggere l'alfabeto cirillico e una gran parte anche l'alfabeto arabo, pur utilizzando i caratteri latini per la propria lingua, la quale è mutualmente intelligibile con il turco (Dooley, 2017; Salehi & Neysani, 2017). Quindi, pur mantenendo una forte specificità culturale, l'Azerbaigian ha abbracciato alcuni elementi europei nella propria identità nazionale, comprendendo così l'Europa come parte integrante della sua storia e della sua unicità.

4. Mega-eventi in Azerbaigian

Molti governi fanno da tempo uso degli eventi sportivi per rafforzare l'identità nazionale e garantirsi il sostegno da parte della popolazione (Rensman, 2015, p. 119). Ospitare mega-eventi è diventato uno strumento importante – specialmente tra gli stati giovani – per acquisire visibilità sul palcoscenico internazionale e accrescere il proprio status. Secondo il sociologo Ekain Rojo-Labaien (2018; Rojo-Labaien, Díaz, & Rookwood, 2020) la questione risulta essere un

sottoprodotto della globalizzazione: attirando l'attenzione pubblica globale sull'organizzazione di un evento, esso diventa la rappresentazione centrale che plasma la percezione globale di quello stato. Di conseguenza, la globalizzazione dello sport ha anche comportato la fine del dominio degli stati occidentali sui mega-eventi. Anche gli stati non occidentali sono ora in grado di influenzare l'organizzazione degli eventi sportivi, attraendo a sé l'attenzione del mondo intero, oltre che ingenti flussi di capitali, turismo e notorietà (Gupta, 2009).

Nella sua ondata di trasformazione post-sovietica e nell'ottica di vicinanza (geo-politica) all'Europa, l'Azerbaijan ha investito nella creazione di infrastrutture per poter ospitare mega-eventi di rilevanza mondiale e, come accennato precedentemente, le squadre sportive della cosiddetta "Terra del fuoco"² partecipano alle competizioni dedicate alle nazioni europee, nonostante la collocazione geografica in Asia. Tra gli eventi principali possiamo elencare il Gran Premio di Formula 1 che si corre tra le strade cittadine della capitale Baku – il quale è di curiosa rilevanza poiché la prima edizione del 2016 fu denominata Gran Premio d'Europa, per poi mutare in Gran Premio d'Azerbaijan dall'anno successivo. Entrando nel mondo del calcio, la nazionale e le squadre di club azerbaigiane fanno parte della confederazione europea, la UEFA, e lo stadio olimpico di Baku è una sede importante per scambi di relazioni politico/sportive tra l'Azerbaijan e l'Europa, sia perché la cerimonia di inizio costruzione del 2011 è stata condotta dal presidente Ilham Aliyev, dal presidente della FIFA Joseph Blatter e dal Presidente UEFA Michel Platini, sia perché l'inaugurazione è avvenuta in concomitanza della cerimonia d'apertura dei Giochi Olimpici Europei del 2015 – sui quali torneremo a breve. Tra gli altri eventi di rilevanza europea tenutesi nello stadio olimpico di Baku nei vari anni, possiamo citare diverse partite della UEFA Champion's League, della UEFA Europa League (tra cui la finale nel 2019), gli Europei Under 17 nel 2016 e le partite di un girone di EURO 2020. Si può poi citare un evento non sportivo ma comunque facente parte di una importante competizione europea, ovvero la Eurovision Song Contest, vinto dal duo azeri Ell & Nikki nel 2011 che ha permesso all'Azerbaijan di ospitare per la prima volta la manifestazione l'anno successivo. A tal fine, nella capitale è stata costruita la Baku Crystal Hall, un'arena coperta dalla capienza di 25.000 spettatori dove da quel momento si sono tenuti numerosi concerti di cantanti internazionali e competizioni sportive – ad esempio, le Olimpiadi di scacchi del 2016, i mondiali di Taekwondo e i Campionati europei di ginnastica ritmica, entrambi del 2023, e soprattutto numerosi eventi dei poc'anzi citati Giochi Europei del 2015.

L'Eurovision e i Giochi Europei sono di particolare rilevanza per il nostro studio poiché è grazie alla vittoria nel primo che l'Azerbaijan ha potuto testare la sua capacità di organizzare con successo mega-eventi, per poi consolidarla con l'assegnazione del secondo, ed essere lanciata tra le sedi più credibili per manifestazioni di tale portata. Dopo il successo dell'Eurovision e la

² Il paese è conosciuto con questo soprannome poiché intriso di significati simbolici con riferimenti a questo elemento. Il toponimo stesso Azerbaijan deriva da *Oder-bey-can*, una composizione di tre parole di origine turca: *od* (fuoco) ed *er* (guerriero) dunque "guerrieri del fuoco"; *bey* è un titolo usato ancora oggi tra le popolazioni turcofone come segno di rispetto verso l'interlocutore, mentre *can* significa anima. Pertanto, il significato del nome sarebbe "l'anima dei nobili guerrieri del fuoco". Inoltre, in Azerbaijan il fuoco è tuttora un elemento dotato di sacralità – ereditata dallo zoroastrismo, religione ufficiale dell'Impero persiano di cui faceva parte – grazie anche a due luoghi caratteristici vicino Baku: *Yanar Dag* (monte che brucia) una montagna le cui pendici ardono incessantemente grazie al gas che ne fuoriesce e *Ateshgah*, l'antico tempio zoroastriano del fuoco sacro. Il legame col fuoco è chiaramente visibile da ogni visitatore: camminando lungo le strade cittadine non è infrequente imbattersi in monumenti dove risiedono bracieri ardenti enormemente rispettati dagli azerbaigiani (Rahiminia, 2019).

realizzazione di alcuni altri eventi di rilevanza regionale, le autorità azerbaigiane hanno pertanto concluso che il paese fosse in grado di ospitare un evento di portata internazionale.

Dunque, dopo la fallita candidatura per le Olimpiadi del 2016 – assegnate a Rio de Janeiro – e del 2020 – assegnate poi a Tokyo e tenutesi nel 2021, a causa della pandemia di Covid-19 – e avendo già costruito tredici nuove strutture sportive, le autorità di Baku decisero di puntare ad un evento di leggermente minor portata per accrescere il proprio curriculum, in vista di una futura nuova candidatura olimpica. L'opportunità si presentò l'8 dicembre del 2012, quando i membri della quarantunesima Assemblea Generale del Comitato Olimpico Europeo (EOC) tenutasi a Roma decisero di organizzare i primi Giochi Europei – completando così la gamma dei tornei continentali di tipo olimpico, in aggiunta ai Giochi asiatici, ai Giochi del Pacifico, ai Giochi panamericani e ai Giochi panafricani.

I Giochi inaugurali del 2015 vennero dunque assegnati a Baku, marcando così a livello mondiale l'appartenenza simbolica dell'Azerbaigian tra i paesi dell'Europa. Come disse l'allora Ministro della gioventù Azad Rahimov:

per un paese che ha ottenuto l'indipendenza solo 23 anni fa, è molto importante posizionarsi sulla mappa dell'Europa come un paese europeo. Molto spesso viene posta la domanda "Dove si trova l'Azerbaigian?". Dopo l'Eurovision Song Contest e dopo i Giochi Europei, la maggior parte delle persone saprà la risposta (Valiyev, 2016, p 137).

Secondo le ricerche del sociologo Murad Ismailov (2012) il termine "Azerbaijan" è stato cercato su Google otto volte in più nel mese successivo alla vittoria nel concorso canoro del 2011. Sempre in quel periodo, sono raddoppiate le ricerche generiche sulla capitale Baku e sono esplose le ricerche su TripAdvisor come destinazione turistica.

L'assegnazione dei Giochi europei fece anche modificare la politica immigratoria azerbaigiana: fu eliminato il requisito del visto per tutti gli atleti partecipanti e gli ufficiali di gara accreditati; mentre tutti gli spettatori stranieri ebbero la possibilità di ottenere un visto all'arrivo in aeroporto sulla base della prova di acquisto dei biglietti (APA Xeberimiz Var, 2014; Trend News Agency, 2014). All'evento parteciparono circa seimila atleti e tremila ufficiali di gara provenienti dai Comitati Olimpici Nazionali di tutta Europa, furono assunte 1600 persone dalla Baku European Games Operations Committee e circa 12.000 volontari furono coinvolti nell'organizzazione della manifestazione. Per Baku, al fine di ottenere il riconoscimento internazionale sperato, la preoccupazione principale era garantire l'immagine del paese e, a tal proposito, venne nominato direttore artistico Dimitris Papaioannou, già maestro delle cerimonie dei Giochi Olimpici di Atene 2004, il quale ideò una cerimonia d'apertura inaugurata con "Imagine" di John Lennon intonata da Lady Gaga, a cui fecero seguito duemila ballerine danzanti su melodie tradizionali azere durante l'accensione della fiamma. Il tutto contornato da un'esposizione dedicata alla produzione letteraria del famoso poeta azero del dodicesimo secolo Nizami Ganjavi – una cerimonia del costo di 100 milioni di dollari per l'apertura e 140 milioni per la chiusura. Raggiungendo la cifra di 1,7 miliardi di spettatori distribuiti in 145 paesi, si può dire che con questo evento il paese abbia dunque avuto successo nell'attirare, oltre che dell'Occidente, anche l'attenzione del mondo intero (Race, 2015; Valiyev, 2016).

5. Lo sport in Azerbaijan nel campo del potere (politico)

Politica e sport sono strettamente legati in Azerbaijan, al punto che la maggior parte delle federazioni sportive nazionali del paese sono guidate da alti funzionari del governo. Nello specifico: Farid Gayibov, ministro della gioventù e dello sport, è allo stesso tempo vicepresidente del Comitato Olimpico Nazionale dell'Azerbaijan e presidente dell'European Gymnastics; Sahil Babayev, ministro del lavoro, è presidente della Azerbaijan Boxing Federation; il ministro all'educazione Emin Amrullayev è presidente della federazione azerbaigiana di pallacanestro; il generale Elchin Guliyev, comandante della *Dövlət Sərhəd Xidməti* – la forza armata che si occupa dei confini del paese – è a capo della federazione azerbaigiana di equitazione; Fazil Mammadov, già ministro dell'economia fino al 2017, è stato a capo della federazione azerbaigiana di hockey, di quella di ciclismo e di quella di lotta; Huseyngulu Baghirov, già ministro dell'ecologia fino al 2018, è presidente della federazione per gli sport estremi; il generale Madat Guliyev, ministro dell'industria bellica, oltre a essere maestro e cintura nera 7° dan di karate, è attualmente presidente della federazione del ciclismo e vicepresidente della federazione azerbaigiana di automobilismo; il già ministro dei trasporti Ziya Mammadov, è stato anche presidente della federazione nazionale di pallavolo fino al 2016 – mentre allo stesso tempo suo figlio Anar dirigeva la federazione azerbaigiana di golf – il ministro della cultura Adil Karimli, dopo essere stato capo della delegazione azerbaigiana all'Eurovision, è diventato membro del consiglio della federazione nazionale di automobilismo; l'attuale ministro all'economia Mikayil Jabbarov è stato, fino al 2021, presidente sia della federazione nazionale di scherma che di quella di badminton, per poi diventare presidente della federazione azerbaigiana di lotta. Salendo un gradino più in alto nella gerarchia governativa troviamo a capo della federazione nazionale di ginnastica Mehriban Aliyeva, first-lady e prima vicepresidente dell'Azerbaijan, e, in cima alla piramide, il presidente della Repubblica Ilham Aliyev, capo del Comitato Olimpico Nazionale dell'Azerbaijan.

Oltre alle cariche assegnate ai membri del governo, non si può negare che il governo abbia a cuore il successo delle proprie squadre sportive – con il conseguente ritorno d'immagine – tant'è che, in un suo discorso ufficiale nel 2019, il presidente Aliyev (2019) affermò fermamente che “l'Azerbaijan è, e sarà sempre conosciuto come, un paese sportivo”. Lo Stato finanzia direttamente le sue federazioni: la SOCAR, la compagnia petrolifera statale, tra il 2011 e il 2021 ha versato quasi 133 milioni di manat alla Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan – circa 72 milioni di euro al tasso di cambio attuale (Rookwood, 2022). Nel 2017, il presidente Aliyev ha annunciato di voler destinare un totale di 3 milioni di manat – circa 1,6 milioni di euro – alle federazioni di scacchi e pallavolo, in seguito ai loro successi rispettivamente nei Campionati Europei a squadre di scacchi e negli Europei femminili di pallavolo. In aggiunta, al 2022, il governo ha donato un totale di 2 milioni di manat – poco più di un milione di euro – alla federazione azerbaigiana di Lotta, citando i vari successi della squadra nei campionati europei (Natiqqizi, 2022).

In un articolo del 2017 riguardo a questi finanziamenti e al coinvolgimento diretto del governo, l'allora vicepresidente esecutivo della Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) Elkhon Mammadov (2017) – diventato nel mentre prima capo del comitato per il fair-play della UEFA e poi direttore delle associazioni europee membri della FIFA – ha confermato la tecnica di diplomazia sportiva praticata dall'Azerbaijan, affermando che “lo sport fornisce ampie

opportunità per la diplomazia, la mediazione e la comunicazione interculturale”. Con la partecipazione ai campionati per club europei, il calcio ha indubbiamente fornito un’opportunità per presentare l’Azerbaigian e le sue imprese al resto del mondo, tant’è che la AFFA ha siglato partnership di alto livello con organizzazioni come UNICEF e aziende come Hyundai. Queste sponsorizzazioni hanno fatto conoscere l’Azerbaigian a più paesi europei che mai, creando i presupposti per stabilire legami con nazioni di altri continenti. E’ la conferma che gli eventi sportivi rappresentano un potente strumento, per i paesi meno conosciuti, di costruzione della propria cultura “ufficiale”, ma anche di cooperazione e partecipazione a scambi di idee a livello globale. Mammadov (2017) conclude:

poiché i paesi continuano a svilupparsi spesso lungo percorsi diversi, ci sarà sempre bisogno di diplomazia attraverso mezzi alternativi. Dove i conflitti continuano a verificarsi per motivi di geografia, economia e religione, lo sport rimane uno spazio sicuro in cui comunicare e interagire. Mentre i diplomatici lavorano per soluzioni a lungo termine nel campo politico, eventi sportivi e organizzazioni internazionali consentono la diplomazia in ottica di soft power e lo scambio culturale tra i tifosi, uniti nel loro amore per il gioco.

La stessa convinzione è condivisa da Mikayil Bayramov, senior advisor per i diritti sociali e culturali dell’ufficio dell’Ombudsman dell’Azerbaigian, il commissario per i diritti umani. In un’intervista³ realizzata per questa ricerca spiega:

grazie alle passioni e ai valori fondamentali, [la diplomazia sportiva praticata dall’Azerbaigian] contribuisce a colmare le divisioni tra la conoscenza di un dato problema e il percorso per risolverlo. Se fatto correttamente e con rispetto, le persone possono trovare un punto d’accordo e queste passioni comuni – sport, musica ecc. – diventano ottimi argomenti per socializzare e formare nuove relazioni.

Nel corso dell’intervista, Bayramov ha citato un altro episodio con risultati nel campo politico/diplomatico, ovvero il Memorandum di intesa firmato il 3 aprile 2023 tra la Azerbaijan Disabled Football Federation e la ANAMA, l’agenzia nazionale che si occupa della rimozione delle mine antiuomo tuttora presenti nel territorio del Karabakh⁴.

Si tratta di un accordo firmato per creare una squadra di calcio composta da giocatori che hanno dovuto subire l’amputazione di un arto a seguito del calpestamento di un ordigno esplosivo. L’intento è sensibilizzare l’opinione internazionale riguardo alla grave crisi umanitaria nella zona, dal momento che uno dei residui della cosiddetta “Guerra del Nagorno-Karabakh” è la presenza diffusa di mine antiuomo lasciate dall’Armenia alla fine del conflitto lampo del 2020. Dall’agosto 2022 ad oggi, in alcune parti dei distretti di Lachin e Kalbajar dell’Azerbaigian, sono state localizzate oltre 2.700 mine antiuomo costruite in Armenia nel 2021 – il che significa che sono state prodotte dopo la fine della seconda guerra del Karabakh. Gli effetti di questi ordigni sono devastanti: da novembre 2020 ad oggi, hanno causato la morte di circa 50 persone e gravemente ferito oltre duecentocinquanta. La maggior parte delle vittime sono civili poiché oltre 1.600 di questi esplosivi erano stati piazzati in zone non militari e residenziali, rendendo questa regione dell’Azerbaigian una delle aree più contaminate al mondo da mine antiuomo. Il 12 giugno del 2021, il primo ministro armeno Nikol Pashinyan ha consegnato a Baku quella che, il giorno dopo,

³ Intervista condotta dall’autore in data 28 Febbraio 2024.

⁴ Territorio internazionalmente riconosciuto come appartenente all’Azerbaigian, affermazione supportata dalle Risoluzioni ONU n.822, n.853, n.874, n.884.

ha confessato essere una piccola frazione delle mappe – facendo quindi intendere di non voler consegnare le versioni complete. Le cartine rilasciate dall'Armenia, le quali coprono solo il 5% dei territori riconquistati dall'Azerbaijan, indicano la presenza di ben 97.000 mine terrestri in uno spazio così ristretto, lasciando all'immaginazione la vera portata del pericolo. Yerevan, ad oggi, continua a rifiutarsi di consegnare le mappe complete nonostante l'intervento della Commissione per gli affari esteri del Parlamento Europeo sottoscritto da una richiesta formale contenuta nella relazione del 20 febbraio 2023. All'inizio di febbraio 2024, la ANAMA, con il supporto dell'UNDP, ha bonificato complessivamente 64.000 ettari nel Karabakh, rimuovendo 8.780 mine antiuomo, 4.133 mine anticarro e 14.950 altri tipi di ordigni inesplosi (Krikorian, 2023; Rahiminia, 2023; Zovko, 2023).

6. Conclusioni

Facendo ritorno alle relazioni con l'Unione Europea, il direttore del Public and International Affairs Department presso la ADA University of Baku, Anar Valiyev⁵, oltre a confermare quanto espresso in queste pagine sottolinea come, nonostante la vicinanza ideale con l'Europa, il governo azerbaijano non solo non aspira a un'integrazione istituzionale dentro l'UE, ma chiede di avere un ruolo negoziale di maggior rilievo a tutela dei propri interessi. In effetti, l'eventuale inclusione dell'Azerbaijan come nuovo membro dell'Unione implicherebbe per la "Terra del fuoco" sottostare alle leggi del parlamento comunitario, col rischio di vedere contestata l'agenda estera; uno scenario che potrebbe minacciare la stabilità del paese così com'è organizzato attualmente. D'altra parte, sottolinea Eske van Gils (2020, p. 228), questa volontà di non affiliazione all'UE può essere letta come una dimostrazione di forza istituzionale del governo, nonché un aspetto costitutivo della narrativa dell'indipendenza nazionale, entrambe fonti di legittimazione su cui poggia la (relativamente giovane) Repubblica.

In definitiva, si può prevedere la prosecuzione delle relazioni di cooperazione tra Azerbaijan e Unione Europea. Le Priorità di Partenariato firmate da Bruxelles e Baku nel 2018 mostrano una continuità di fondo con l'agenda di cooperazione del 1999. Tuttavia, la situazione geopolitica dell'Azerbaijan è in perenne mutamento. Finora il paese ha saputo utilizzare i mega-eventi per dimostrare, nel contesto delle relazioni internazionali, quanto velocemente abbia saputo "modernizzarsi", quanto possa essere considerato vicino al cosiddetto mondo occidentale – pur mantenendo allo stesso tempo la sua peculiare identità – quanto sia in grado di saldare le sue relazioni con i paesi europei – come nazioni – e con l'Unione Europea – come istituzione. Anche se non è dato sapere come i processi diplomatici evolveranno, è lecito ipotizzare che, almeno in una certa misura, dipenderanno dalle dinamiche di politica interna, tra cui rientra la governance dello sport.

⁵ Le considerazioni di Anar Valiyev sono basate su un'intervista condotta dall'autore in data 5 Febbraio 2024.

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Cuerpos en pantallas: vencedores y derrotados en documentales olímpicos (Olympia, 1936-1939/Olimpíadas de Tokio, 1965)

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Abstract

One of the elective affinities of modern history are the births of the Olympics and cinema, both in 1896. The confluence between a phenomenon and another occurs in several situations, like in the documentaries. The most famous is Leni Riefenstahl's Olympia (1938-1939), about Berlin 1936, in that bodies are athletic, happy, without suffering. But others, like the Olympics of Tokyo (1965), have another tone. Kon Ichikawa's Ouvre shows the bodies in different situations. Obviously, the victors appear, but also defeated, athletes that arrive in the last places, exhausted, without brightness or glory. The film also deals, with very refined montage, of other "invisible" characters, such as the officials of the modalities. This paper investigates these forms of cinematographic representation (which are disputes for what sport can be).

Keywords: Olympic Games, Cinema, Memory, Bodies, Politics.

1. Cine y deporte

El siglo pasado estuvo marcado tanto por el enorme desarrollo de la prensa y de otros medios de comunicación, como por la interconexión de esos medios, de manera que amplió exponencialmente lo que Walter Benjamin (1999) había vaticinado respecto a los años 1800: un fenómeno ocurrido a miles de kilómetros se vuelve más importante que un acontecimiento cercano a la casa. Si podemos sintetizar ese movimiento en una expresión, mismo sin endosar el programa que desarrolló su autor, se trata de lo que Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1972) llamó la constitución de la aldea global. Coincide con ese proceso la universalización del deporte, tal como Eric Hobsbawm (1996) y tantos lo demostraron, principalmente, a partir de la Inglaterra moderna, impulsado por el colonialismo y diseminándose por el mundo. No es casual que antiguas colonias inglesas tengan equipos que hoy se destacan en modalidades como hockey, rugby y atletismo.

La prensa creció mucho con el deporte y viceversa, al punto de que es imposible pensar en el último sin considerar la primera. Diarios, revistas y programas radiofónicos y luego televisivos, especializados o no, y más allá de ellos, los múltiples recursos que hoy ofrece la red mundial de

computadoras, son medios no solamente de divulgación de fenómenos y acontecimientos, sino de producción de una manera de ver, pensar y sentir los deportes. Las primeras transmisiones televisivas en Alemania, por ejemplo, fueron para los quince aparatos esparcidos por la ciudad de Berlín, que le ofrecieron a la población la posibilidad de mirar fragmentos de las Olimpiadas de 1936, sin tener que desplazarse hasta el parque olímpico construido en la parte sur de la ciudad. Si no se puede pensar en el deporte fuera de su dimensión de espectáculo universal, esto se debe, evidentemente, al enorme desarrollo de los medios de comunicación que son, simultáneamente, medios que componen la propia espectacularización del deporte. Imágenes, textos y voces educan sensibilidades para una manera de apreciar deportes, de dejarse seducir por ellos.

Forma parte del desarrollo de los medios el nacimiento de la fotografía y de su sucesor, el cine. El vínculo entre este y el deporte trae algo interesante en términos de una afinidad electiva que puede ser encontrada: el juego. En ambos está presente una dimensión lúdica, mimética, que a pesar de verse reprimida por la industria cultural y por el código victoria-derrota, permanece al acecho como potencia. Vale aquí pensar en los sentidos de la palabra *Spiele* en alemán, cuya traducción más inmediata es jugar, utilizada tanto para referirse a la dramatización de una pieza teatral, como a un juego infantil o mismo para designar la práctica de un deporte (*Fußballspielen*), apareciendo aún en la composición de una expresión germánica más antigua para cine, que es *Lichtspiel*, literalmente, juego de luz.

Junto con las proyecciones en la pantalla en grandes salones, nacen también los Juegos Olímpicos de la Era Moderna, que darán al deporte un sentido específico que, en parte, se mantiene hasta hoy. Hijos del mismo *Zeitgeist*, componen historias de sentidos opuestos. Mientras que las películas son documentación, entretenimiento y luego serán también arte, volviéndose además territorio de disputas ético-políticas, principalmente a partir de los años 1930, las Olimpiadas tienen, como lo bien destacó Susan Buck-Morss (1991), carácter restaurativo, conservador. Su invención se vincula a la reacción aristocrática frente a la sociedad burguesa (poco más de 100 años antes fue la Revolución Burguesa en Francia), de donde entonces vienen los valores del amateurismo, que restringen la participación popular; misóginos, una vez impiden en un primer momento la participación de mujeres; y elitistas, al buscar ser una resonancia de los Juegos de la Antigüedad, actualizando en el “hombre de bien” que practica deportes el ideal del hombre griego heroico y dedicado desinteresadamente al cultivo de sí.

Desde hace mucho, hay el interés en documentar los Juegos Olímpicos. El encuentro entre estos y el cine se da por lo menos desde 1904 (Galak, 2021), aunque la primera película oficial del evento parece ser la de la edición celebrada en Estocolmo, Suecia. Sobre dichas Olimpiadas es la película considerada como la más antigua en el sitio del International Olympic Committee (IOC)¹. El gran salto cualitativo sucede, sin embargo, en 1928, con el documental *El estadio blanco* (*Das weiße Stadion*), de Arnold Fanck y Othmar Gurtner, sobre los Juegos de Invierno en Saint Moritz, Suiza. Casi al mismo tiempo, pero a unos buenos kilómetros de distancia, el soviético, Dziga Vertov, contribuía con su propia invención de maneras de filmar deportes con su legendario *El ser humano y la cámara* (1929). Eran las primeras grandes líneas estéticas del cine en experimentación, en juego y tomando en cuenta un sujeto que se ejercita, con la máquina

¹ <https://olympics.com/en/original-series/olympic-documentaries/>.

haciendo lo mismo (aunque fija) en relación a aquel humano que ella busca, en su movimiento, capturar. Un sujeto que se mueve con ciertos fines no propiamente prácticos, pero simbólicos, dado el carácter de inutilidad (y ahí exactamente reside su gran mérito) de las prácticas deportivas: saltar más lejos o más alto, o correr más rápido, son medios de supervivencia mucho menos eficaces que los producidos por las máquinas construidas por los propios seres humanos. Es decir, en la falta de utilidad para los cuerpos, una vez sustituidos por maquinarias para casi todo, ellos son puestos a jugar unos contra los otros, o contra la naturaleza y el tiempo. De eso se trata cuando hablamos de deporte.

Desde por lo menos la quinta edición de los Juegos de Verano, justamente los de Estocolmo, y desde la primera de los Juegos de Invierno en Chamonix, 1924, cada dos años un documental es producido, con excepción de los períodos en que no hubo Olimpiadas, durante las dos grandes guerras del siglo veinte. Cada película presenta opciones técnicas y estéticas –y, por lo tanto, políticas– muy variadas, que van desde lo más convencional, con la simple glorificación de cada uno de los campeones narrada de forma lineal y que podría ser confundida con un programa deportivo de la televisión, hasta algunas con grandes pretensiones estéticas y de construcción artística poco común. Uno de ellas es *Ocho visiones* (*Visions of Eight*, 1973), reunión de cortometrajes sobre las Olimpiadas de Múnich, Alemania Occidental, en 1972. Yuri Ozerov, Mai Zetterling, Arthur Penn, Michael Pfleghar, Kon Ichikawa, Milos Forman, Claude Lelouch y John Schlesinger son los directores de cada uno de los segmentos. Aunque apenas uno de ellos, el del británico Schlesinger, aborda el secuestro y asesinato de atletas y dirigentes israelíes por un comando palestino –hecho que marcó aquel evento–, son todos, sin embargo, muy interesantes, incluso por la mirada inusual que promueven: el francés Lelouch destaca los perdedores, los fracasados, mientras que la sueca Zetterling anuncia en el inicio de su trabajo que no se interesa por deportes, pero sí por obsesiones. Es una de las maneras más precisas de entender el fenómeno deportivo de alto rendimiento, que, sin la dedicación obsesiva a los entrenamientos y otras formas de preparación, probablemente no existiría.

Otra obra de las más interesantes – estemos o no de acuerdo con las opciones estéticas de sus directores, Arnold Fanck y Othmar Gurtner – es la ya mencionada *El estadio blanco*, sobre las Olimpiadas Invernales disputadas en Saint Moritz, en los Alpes suizos, en 1928. Como en otras películas de Fanck, el apelo se vuelca a la naturaleza, ella misma capaz de construir un estadio sin (much) interferencia de las manos humanas. La grandeza se encuentra en las altas montañas nevadas, en la simetría de los movimientos corporales buscados en cada gesto de la patinadora o del hombre que esquía, en la desnudez de los cuerpos que remite a la esencia natural, como si no fuese el deporte parte de la cultura, sino extensión del suelo, de la nieve, de la vegetación.

Fanck había hecho (y seguiría haciendo) películas ficcionales, algunas protagonizadas por Leni Riefenstahl, en las que el montañismo y el paisaje son aspectos centrales. Y es exactamente de esa actriz, bailarina, cineasta, fotógrafa y, décadas después, buceadora, la película más emblemática entre todas las realizadas sobre los Juegos Olímpicos. Se trata del extenso proyecto *Olympia*, con casi cuatro horas de duración, dividido en dos partes: *Fiesta de los pueblos – Fest der Völker* – y *Fiesta de la belleza – Fest des Schönes*) sobre los Juegos de 1936, celebrados en Berlín. La semejanza con la película sobre las competencias en Saint Moritz es notable, menos por los deportes en sí, obviamente, y más por la concepción escénica, aunque, en el caso berlinés, se

suma la estilización de los cuerpos y la glorificación a Adolph Hitler. La segunda parte de la película, en la cual se presenta una perspectiva muy delimitada de belleza, abre con una secuencia que opera directamente con la idea de pureza de los hombres germánicos en su relación directa con la naturaleza. Son imágenes que bien podrían haber sido filmadas y montadas por Fanck y su equipo. La propia Riefenstahl evoca la alianza entre su proyecto y el del maestro en sus memorias:

Fanck finalmente no podía hacer una película ficcional; [entonces] aceptó una oferta de Suiza para filmar los Juegos Olímpicos de Invierno de 1928, en St. Moritz. Como estaba obligado a tener a Schneeberger como cinematografista y yo me encontraba sin trabajo, viajé para allá y vivencí como espectadora mi primera Olimpiada. Ese evento fue para mí una gran experiencia. Tener el bellísimo paisaje del Engadin como moldura de los, por entonces jóvenes, Juegos Olímpicos era como la imagen de un escenario de un “cuento de invierno”² (Riefenstahl, 1994, p. 103, *traducción nuestra*).

Es sobre la película de Riefenstahl a la que se dedican las próximas páginas. Pero no solamente, ya que a esta se le suma la obra de Kon Ichikawa (*Tōkyō orinpikku*, 1965) sobre los Juegos de Tokio, celebrados en 1964. Como ya se mencionó, el director volvería al tema en 1972, siendo responsable de una de las ocho visiones sobre Múnich. *Olimpiadas de Tokio* es en casi todo diferente de la película sobre Berlín, tanto en la concepción estética como en el tono de la narrativa y las opciones de montaje, que privilegian demorados encuadramientos en detalles que no tienen relevancia para los grandes resultados deportivos, pero sí pueden tenerla para el propio cine como arte y, en especial, para una comprensión sobre el deporte que escapa de la idea de perfeccionismo. Si Riefenstahl está en búsqueda de mostrar la perfección que el ser humano puede alcanzar – y eso no se limita a la película sobre los Juegos, sino que se extiende a gran parte de su cinematografía y de su trabajo como fotógrafa –, lo que mueve el ojo de Ichikawa es el detalle irrelevante: la mirada sostenida de un espectador, la fila en la que madres e hijos esperan pacientemente para entrar al baño, el rostro de un niño que no entiende muy bien lo que está pasando, la soledad de un atleta de un joven país, cerrado en sí mismo en la Villa Olímpica. Este texto pretende ser un comentario sobre esas películas, considerando algunas de las cuestiones técnicas, estéticas y políticas que conforman las imágenes montadas para la pantalla grande, imágenes que muestran cuerpos en movimiento de distintas maneras y, por lo tanto, proponiendo interpretaciones sobre ellos igualmente diversas. La siguiente sección presenta brevemente aspectos generales de las dos obras, para luego discutir las opciones narrativas de cada una. Antes de las consideraciones finales, el texto también debate la idea de belleza y de su producción, conforme cada una de las películas.

² “Fank konnte an schließend keinen Spielfilm machen; er hatte ein Angebot aus der Schweiz angenommen, die Olympischen Winterspiele 1928 in St. Moritz zu verfilmen. Da er Schneeberger als Kameramann verpflichtete und ich ohne Arbeit war, fuhr ich mit und erlebte dort als Zuschauerin meine erste Olympiade. Diese Veranstaltung wurde für mich zu einem großen Erlebnis. Schon diese traumhaft schöne Landschaft des Engadin als Rahmen der damals noch jungfräulichen Olympischen Spiele war wie das Bühnenbild eines ‘Wintermärchens’”.

2. Dos grandes obras

Olympia y *Olimpiadas de Tokio* son realizaciones grandiosas, resultados de un enorme esfuerzo, compuestas por centenas de técnicos en cada producción y lideradas por dos cineastas de primera línea. No deja de ser curioso que, en más de una ocasión, estas películas sean comparadas, aunque no de la misma forma. Si bien, por un lado, Annette Vowinckel (2012) ve en la construcción de ambos trabajos una notable semejanza, destacando que Ichikawa llega a citar Riefenstahl en una secuencia en que el salto con garrocha es presentado, alguien como Susan Sontag (2011) coloca a uno en contraposición con el otro.

De hecho, las competencias de salto con garrocha, de larga duración, ofrecieron la posibilidad para que una y la otra película pudieran presentar como una duradera contienda por el punto más alto posible a ser alcanzado por un hombre (aún no existía la prueba femenina) con las propias fuerzas y con la ayuda apenas de una palanca maniobrada por él. Además, el cierre del evento con la noche cayendo, hace que el crepúsculo pueda ser la moldura para las bellas y eficaces transiciones entre las secuencias. No hay dudas sobre la calidad técnica del trabajo de Walter Frentz, director de fotografía que trabajó con Riefenstahl en *Olympia* y en varias otras películas, y de la propia realizadora, que se encargó también de gran parte del montaje de la obra. Tiene sentido, por lo tanto, la hipótesis de Vowinckel (2012), según la cual Ichikawa citó a la obra alemana. Y nada más.

Sontag, al comparar el esfuerzo desplegado en la danza con aquel utilizado en el deporte, sugiere algo distinto:

En el deporte, las señales del esfuerzo no se ocultan: por el contrario, hacer visible el esfuerzo es parte del alarde. El público espera ver, y le emociona, el espectáculo del atleta que manifiestamente se obliga a sobrepasar las limitaciones de su rendimiento. Las imágenes de los partidos de tenis o del Tour de Francia o cualquier otro documento exhaustivo sobre la competición atlética (un ejemplo espléndido: la Olimpiada de Tokio de Ichikawa) siempre revelan el esfuerzo y la tensión del atleta. (En efecto, el grado en el que Leni Riefenstahl, en su película sobre los juegos olímpicos de 1936, prefirió no mostrar a los atletas bajo este aspecto es uno de los indicios de que su película en realidad es política — la estetización de la política en un espectáculo de masas del todo ordenado e interpretada en solitario de modo imperturbable — y no sobre el deporte mismo) (Sontag, 2011, p. 324).

A pesar de la escena del salto con garrocha — y tal vez debido a esa única escena — no puede haber películas más diferentes entre sí que *Olympia* y *Olimpiadas de Tokio*. Y eso no se refiere solo a que una se haya hecho en blanco y negro con película común y la otra en color y en cinemascope.

3. Disputas de atletas, disputas estético-políticas

Llama a la atención que el equipo olímpico japonés sea privilegiado en el trabajo de Riefenstahl, así como un dirigente del país asiático fuera destacado en el documental *Triunfo de la voluntad* (*Triumph des Willens*, 1935), sobre la reunión anual del Partido Nacional-socialista de los Trabajadores Alemanes, el partido nazista, en 1934. En la antesala de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, los Juegos Olímpicos de Berlín 1936 se convirtieron en un escenario donde se entrelazaban la

política y el deporte. La película sobre este evento destaca no solo la participación de atletas italianos, sino también la presencia de líderes de este país, tal como se evidencia en el documental de 1935. Además, *Olympia*, que documenta estos Juegos, recibió el premio Mussolini en el Festival de Venecia de 1938, subrayando la importancia que el régimen fascista italiano otorgaba a este evento deportivo. Por otro lado, los Juegos Olímpicos de Tokio 1964, que tuvieron lugar 19 años después del fin de la guerra, ofrecen un contraste interesante y serán analizados en detalle más adelante.

Ambas películas abren mostrando ruinas. En la de Riefenstahl, vemos los restos de las construcciones que habrían albergado los Juegos Olímpicos de la Antigüedad, una Atenas que sería resucitada en Berlín bajo el nacional-socialismo. Después de mirar a las bailarinas (una de ellas es la propia directora de la obra) en una coreografía que homenajea los dioses del Olimpo, surge la antorcha olímpica en una animación sobre el mapa de Europa, hasta llegar a Berlín, cuando el Discóbolo griego se transforma de estatua en carne, asumiendo el cuerpo, el rostro y el movimiento de un atleta alemán que está por lanzar el disco.

En la película de Ichikawa, por su parte, los escombros son de un edificio en demolición, pero estamos en Tokio y es de la construcción de las instalaciones olímpicas (y de la reconstrucción de un país) de lo que se trata. Para demarcar el camino, la pantalla muestra un obrero que sonríe. Es también una sonrisa que estampa el rostro de un atleta que llega al aeropuerto, rodeado por muchos otros, una gran parte de ellos también sonrientes. Desde allí hasta la Villa Olímpica, cuerpos muy variados van desfilando de forma calma y con semblante tranquilo. Las escenas se van alternando con el recorrido de la antorcha olímpica que empieza, como es habitual, en Atenas. El camino es complejo, pasando eventualmente por pequeñas villas y encontrando la curiosidad de las personas comunes que rodean cada atleta que carga el fuego olímpico. En la India, hay un grupo de muchachas que sonríen y fotografían al portador del fuego, mientras algunos varones protestan o discuten entre ellos.

La entrada al estadio es, como se espera en un evento del calibre de los Juegos Olímpicos, bajo los ojos de una multitud que lo llena – y más, que la ve por otros medios, ya que en Alemania se transmitió a los aparatos distribuidos en Berlín y la edición de Tokio fue la primera transmitida para todo el mundo. Hay banderas y un Führer con la melena ceñida para declarar abiertas las competencias, al tiempo que hay un emperador para discretamente hacer lo mismo 28 años después. Antes de eso, las delegaciones desfilan, el pebetero olímpico es prendido, revuelan las palomas. Pero en Tokio podemos ver lo que no se ve en Berlín: hay niños en las tribunas del estadio; una chica y un chico, ambos atletas, conversan y parecen alejados de lo que sucede, más interesados uno en el otro; un grupo de competidores se divierte y sale de la formación, huyendo de los pájaros que volaron y que ahora parecen amenazarlos, como en una película de Hitchcock. Eran más de 100 las cámaras a disposición de Ichikawa, lo que, a partir de sus orientaciones, permitió vasto material de montaje más allá de las competencias propiamente dichas (en su cortometraje para *Ocho visiones*, el director japonés se dedica únicamente a la prueba masculina de 100 metros llanos y para eso emplea, como cuenta al principio de la película, 22 cámaras).

El atletismo se convierte en el protagonista indiscutible de la primera parte de *Olympia*. Tras la efervescencia de la ceremonia de apertura, la cámara de Riefenstahl se centra en las diversas pruebas de pista y campo, capturando la intensidad y la emoción de cada competencia. Algo

semejante ocurre con *Olimpiadas de Tokio*, donde la modalidad se hace presente aproximadamente durante el 40% de la película, mientras que para otras disciplinas olímpicas son dedicados pocos minutos o, hasta mismo, segundos de exposición. No es casual tal inversión, ya que se trata del deporte más identificado con los Juegos, remitiéndose a prácticas que en los gestos corporales son semejantes a las que suponemos, dadas las fuentes históricas disponibles, eran realizadas en las Olimpiadas de la Antigüedad – correr, saltar, lanzar objetos a la distancia. Se observa, además, que el Barón de Coubertin no era apenas contra la participación de mujeres en los Juegos, pero también a la disputa de los deportes colectivos. De hecho, las modalidades de ese tipo tienen poco peso en las películas, con las notorias excepciones del hockey en *Olimpiadas de Tokio* (hay un conflicto que también es político entre India y Paquistán) y, aún en la misma obra, del voleibol, en que Japón tenía mucha fuerza en el naípe femenino, habiendo alcanzado, no sin grandes dificultades en superar a la Unión Soviética, la medalla de oro.

El atletismo es una modalidad en la que hay poca presencia de la dimensión de juego, y en la cual los resultados – más rápido, más alto, más fuerte – pueden ser medidos con más precisión y comparados entre sí, algo mucho más presente en *Olympia*, preocupada con la excelencia humana traducida en los récords, que en *Olimpiadas de Tokio*, más ameno en relación a eso. De hecho, en la película sobre los Juegos en Japón, el atletismo aparece en su dimensión más cualitativa, con las miradas sobre las victorias y también sobre las derrotas, pero recayendo más en el sujeto que las vivencia que en el resultado, fuera por quien fuera alcanzado. Ichikawa y sus colaboradores rescatan, con tal inclinación, algo de la autoría en el deporte.

Hay algo más en esa atracción por el atletismo: tal vez sea en la variedad de pruebas de pista y campo donde una multiplicidad de cuerpos se manifiesta: fuertes, resistentes, veloces, o una combinación de todas estas características. Esa variabilidad es reconocida en cada una de las películas de manera distinta. Más de una vez, el locutor de *Olympia* destaca la disputa entre atletas de diferentes naciones. Sin embargo, cuando se refiere a algunos estadounidenses, llama la atención el hecho de que son personas negras (*Schwarze Amerikaner*), llegando incluso a subrayar, en por lo menos una ocasión, que compiten con el atleta blanco más eficiente del mundo en la misma prueba. El énfasis en la dimensión étnica, en lugar de la nacional, produce un discurso racista que deriva, o puede derivar, al menos en parte, de una experiencia nacional precaria entre los alemanes, generando la busca por algo que fuera común y conformando la mitología de la raza aria. Se trata de una posición reaccionaria en relación a los estados nacionales, un problema complejo y persistente para un país que se unificó tardíamente. Helmuth Plessner (1982) describe acertadamente a Alemania como un "país retrasado como nación".

El destaque étnico al mismo tiempo contrasta y se combina con una escena de las más importantes de *Triunfo de la Voluntad*. En el contexto del encuentro entre Hitler y la juventud nazista en el estadio, una breve secuencia grabada en estudio muestra a uno de los jóvenes preguntando a los otros de qué región de Alemania vienen. Ellos responden que son de Pomerania, Sajonia, etc., hasta que uno de ellos afirma venir de más allá del mar. Se actualiza así la ideología de la sangre y la tierra (*Blut und Boden*), según la cual ser alemán es tener sangre germánica, otorgando una unidad que no se da por el orden jurídico del estado, sino por la organicidad del cuerpo. No sorprende, entonces, que la primera parte de *Olympia* se ocupe de los

pueblos (*Völker*) y no de las naciones, como reza erróneamente la traducción en inglés (*Festival of Nations*) de su título.

Por otro lado, *Olimpiadas de Tokio* presenta una exposición diferente de los atletas, y no solo de ellos, ya que se ocupa con más extensión de que *Olympia*, de otros personajes que componen el teatro del atletismo. Mientras los espectadores de Berlín son mostrados en júbilo por los hechos de los atletas o en apoyo a nacionalidades específicas (en primer plano están los italianos), los de Tokio se presentan de manera diferentes: a veces se muestran solo los ojos o el semblante rápidamente, otras veces lo mismo, pero en planos más largos que sugieren lentitud o incluso desinterés momentáneo. Son adultos, niños y ancianos, japoneses y de muchas otras nacionalidades, apoyando a sus compatriotas, pero también disfrutando del espectáculo.

Ichikawa nos muestra, además, un segmento generalmente ausente en las películas sobre deporte, compuesto por aquellos que trabajan para que los atletas puedan competir y el público disfrutar del espectáculo. Son personas que cuidadosamente alisan la arena en una caja de saltos o luchan contra el agua que forma charcos y dificulta la corrida de los atletas (“a la sombra de los atletas, los trabajadores también participan”, dice el narrador); son voluntarios que sirven vasos de agua, empapan esponjas y asisten a los maratonistas, principalmente a aquellos que llegan tambaleándose, caminando, exhaustos, y que no alcanzarán los primeros lugares; son personas que conversan entre sí, relajadas; y también las que recogen la esfera de 7,26 kilos, en el lanzamiento de bala, y la colocan en una cuneta para que ruede de nuevo hacia los atletas que volverán a lanzarla.

En *Olimpiadas de Tokio* hay una escena de mucha plasticidad, que es cuando atletas del mismo lanzamiento de bala, especialmente uno de ellos, juega con la esfera, haciéndola danzar de una mano a la otra, casi como en una coreografía en la cual ella fuera solista de un ballet. Al mismo tiempo que es un ejercicio de aproximación entre el propio cuerpo y el instrumento deportivo (incorporándolo a sí), se trata igualmente de un juego que, como suele suceder, es experiencia de la búsqueda del placer por la repetición. Vale aquí recordar a Walter Benjamin, según quien hay aquella

gran ley que, por encima de todas las reglas y ritmos aislados, rige sobre el conjunto del mundo de los juegos: la ley de la repetición. Sabemos que para el niño esto es el alma del juego, que nada lo hace más feliz que el “otra vez”. El oscuro afán de reiteración no es menos poderoso ni menos astuto en el juego, que el impulso sexual en el amor. No en vano creía Freud haber descubierto en él un “más allá del principio del placer” (Benjamin, 1989, p. 93).

Como se mencionó, en la película de Riefenstahl hay mucho júbilo por atletas italianos y japoneses – representantes de países que vendrían a constituir el Eje en la Segunda Guerra Mundial. La mayoría de los alemanes que subieron al podio – y son varios los mostrados en la película – levantaron la mano derecha durante la ejecución del himno, haciendo el saludo nazista en dirección al Führer, ubicado en el lugar de mayor destaque en el Estadio Olímpico y presente en varias escenas que se intercalan con las de las competencias. Hubo decepciones también, como la victoria del estadounidense John Youie Woodruff, en los 800 metros llanos, manifestada por el narrador de la película, y la desclasificación del equipo de relevos 4 x 100 metros femenino, que dejó caer el testigo en el último cambio. El estadounidense fue uno de los once atletas negros

vencedores en atletismo en Berlín, llegando primero en una corrida relativamente lenta, definida por empleo de la mejor estrategia, y con un abrupto final.

No hubo, sin embargo, lamento por la derrota de Carl Ludwig Luz Long, uno de los principales atletas locales, que entabló una buena disputa contra Jesse Owens, el cuatro veces medallista de oro en aquellos Juegos. El gran atleta estadounidense aparece con frecuencia en la pantalla, incluso en su amistosa contienda contra el subcampeón. Una de las ambigüedades de *Olympia* es su carácter marcadamente racista, pero con cierto respeto por la figura de Owens, que era negro, tal vez por ser inevitable, o tal vez porque, aunque no era ariano, fue visto igualmente como ejemplo de perfección. Hay, en especial, una toma en la que el velocista aparece solo, enmarcado por un horizonte de atardecer, dominando la escena. Long, a propósito, luchó (y murió) por el Ejército Alemán durante la Segunda Guerra (Woodruff también estuvo en ella, e igualmente en la de Corea, por las Fuerzas Armadas de los EE.UU.), materializando en su singularidad la exposición de la máquina corporal en las Olimpiadas, que antecedió a la máquina bélica alemana menos de tres años después.

En el inicio de este tópico fue mencionada una dimensión cualitativa presente en *Olimpiadas de Tokio*, que contrasta fuertemente con los elogios a los récords en Berlín. En la final de los 800 metros femeninos, la narración presenta a las competidoras de forma poco usual. Una de ellas “es policial”, la otra “tiene dos hijos”, la tercera “se recuperó de una lesión en el tobillo”, la próxima es elogiada por su discreta belleza. En la prueba de los 80 metros con vallas (distancia que ya no es olímpica, sustituida por los 100 metros), a su vez, la representante local llega en cuarto lugar, pero es igualmente elogiada, habiendo realizado una buena representación. Lo mismo sucede en una prueba de natación, en que la atleta japonesa queda fuera del podio, pero es alabada por el esfuerzo emprendido. En los 10.000 metros (masculinos, todavía no había prueba femenina de esa distancia), hay un momento en que el narrador ya no sabe quiénes son los atletas en disputa, mezclados entre sí y cambiando rápidamente de posición. En vez de esconder el lapso, él lo trae para la propia narrativa, admitiéndolo sin consternación y con cierta gracia.

La película de Ichikawa reconoce cierta autoría en los atletas al mostrar, en primer plano, que también hay fragilidad y vida común en ellos, acepción que se extiende igualmente al narrador de la cinta. Con eso, desplaza una característica del deporte de alto rendimiento que ya tenía fuerza en los Juegos de Berlín, pero mucho más en Tokio, alcanzando proporciones superlativas en los días de hoy, que es la importancia del resultado antes que el sujeto que lo realiza, como si éste fuera un apéndice de aquel. La Teoría Crítica del Deporte (Rigauer, 1969; König, 1995; Vaz, 1999, 2004, entre otros) apuntó contra la reificación del cuerpo y su reducción a puro maquinismo manipulable, como requisitos para la existencia del alto rendimiento. *Olimpiadas de Tokio*, sin cambiar esa estructura – lo que no sería posible para una obra fílmica – muestra que en su interior algo resiste justamente donde hay error, detalle, lentitud o apenas vida fuera del deporte.

4. Maneras de filmar la belleza

Es de belleza (en el deporte, pero no solo en él) que tratan las dos películas, aunque esta no sea la misma para una y para la otra. Uno de los análisis más contundentes sobre la estética de Riefenstahl, principalmente a respecto de dos de sus documentales (*Triunfo de la voluntad* y *Olympia*) y también a su trabajo como fotógrafa, en especial de sus libros sobre los Nuba, un grupo étnico africano, es, como ya fue sugerido, el de Susan Sontag. La directora alemana fue analizada por la crítica estadounidense en ensayos, entrevistas y respuestas a polémicas generadas exactamente por sus posiciones (Sontag, 2024). La principal de todas fue con la poetisa Adrienne Rich (2024), que consideró que la ensayista habría sido poco feminista al pasar de un reconocimiento de la grandeza del arte de Riefenstahl en un momento, para después considerar que su estética servía nada más y nada menos que al fascismo. De cualquier forma, Sontag a modo de esclarecimiento, se manifestó así en una entrevista:

Una continuidad, me parece, en el sentido de que ambas afirmaciones ilustran la riqueza de la distinción forma contenido, siempre que se tenga cuidado de utilizarla contra sí misma. En 1965 me refería a las implicaciones formales del contenido, en tanto que el ensayo reciente examina el contenido implícito en determinadas ideas de la forma. Una de las principales afirmaciones de «Sobre el estilo» sostiene que los enfoques formalista e historicista no compiten entre sí, sino que son complementarios e igualmente indispensables. Y en este punto Riefenstahl es pertinente. (...) El párrafo sobre Riefenstahl en «Sobre el estilo» es correcto, en su alcance. Pero no llega muy lejos. Si bien es cierto que sus películas trascienden en algún sentido la propaganda de la que son el vehículo, sus cualidades específicas muestran cómo su concepción estetizante es en sí misma idéntica a un determinado tipo de propaganda (Sontag, 2024, p. 170 ff.).

Aunque hay un cambio de énfasis entre los ensayos (*El tercer mundo de las mujeres* y *Fascinante fascismo*), Sontag reconoce que Riefenstahl documentó los Juegos de manera esmerada y estéticamente innovadora. Sin embargo, este reconocimiento no excluye la crítica de que su trabajo sirvió a una ideología fascista. De cualquier forma, lo que más interesa es tener en cuenta la afirmativa de Sontag, según la cual el documental no sería una película sobre deportes, ya que no muestra el sufrimiento y el dolor propios de esa práctica. La película sería, antes de todo, sobre política, la política de los cuerpos en exposición, como comentó cierta vez Walter Benjamin (1980), y podría haber también señalado Sigfried Kracauer (2012), pensando en el ornamento de la masa – ornamento que él ya notara en las manifestaciones deportivas de la República de Weimar.

De hecho, entre una y otra parte de *Olympia*, lo que menos vemos es dolor y sufrimiento. Al contrario, los lentes de Riefenstahl – o el montaje que, nuevamente se señala, fue principalmente responsabilidad de ella – prefieren expresar una armonía que conecta el deporte a su radicación romántica, o incluso, de forma más extensa, a la celebración de la fantasía según la cual el hombre ario actualizaría al hombre griego, reasumiendo su pureza, rectitud y belleza materializadas en el atleta olímpico. Ambas situaciones corresponden a los ideales olímpicos: el elogio del amateurismo, que remite a la dignidad que el profesionalismo profanaría, bien como la celebración de la perfección masculina, fueron destacadas por el Barón de Coubertin (2000).

Esa dinámica se muestra de manera inequívoca en la apertura de la segunda parte de *Olympia*, intitulada *Fiesta de la belleza*. Vemos bellos árboles, pequeños animales, pájaros y gotas de rocío, que luego dan lugar a un grupo de jóvenes y robustos hombres, todos de cabellos cortos y muy blancos, descalzos y semidesnudos, que corren por una floresta. Al llegar a un lago, se sacan las últimas prendas de ropa y se zambullen en él, para a continuación desplazarse a una sauna, donde se tocan los cuerpos de unos y de otros, viéndose como iguales. Se encuentran con su destino en un ambiente que suponen libre de la cultura, donde se reducen a puro organismo mezclado con la naturaleza, y es porque de ella provienen, más o menos como sucede en la secuencia de apertura de *Triunfo de la voluntad*, cuando acompañamos por algunos minutos a un avión que vuela entre nubes hasta sobrevolar y aterrizar en Nuremberg, donde será realizado el congreso del partido nazista. Dentro del aeroplano está el Führer, pero, como los chicos de la película sobre los Juegos Olímpicos, no sabemos de dónde viene. La mistificación del líder corresponde a la del cuerpo masculino ario, ambos, como conviene al mito, libres de la historia y, por lo tanto, blindados frente a cualquier tipo de crítica. Historia hecha mito.

De la apertura que expone los cuerpos considerados adecuados, la película avanza hacia imágenes en la Villa Olímpica, en que otros cuerpos son mostrados como pintorescos y risibles, comparados en su movimiento con el de animales en la naturaleza. Todo esto se presenta sin narrativa oral – ausente en toda esa parte de *Olympia*, a diferencia de la primera – pero con la debida banda sonora que sugiere grandeza, miedo, burla. Como es habitual en el cine, se emplea el mecanismo de captura de los sentidos del espectador que ya tiene una memoria fílmica desarrollada a lo largo de años frente a la pantalla grande, lo cual, sin embargo, puede reducir las capacidades perceptivas, según sugieren los análisis de Horkheimer y Adorno (1997) y de Adorno con Hans Eisler (1994). Sigue entonces un conjunto de escenas muy bien montadas con fragmentos de las diversas competencias, muchas de ellas filmadas a contraluz, con planos invertidos (como en los saltos ornamentales) y desde diversos ángulos, especialmente de abajo hacia arriba, enaltecendo la grandeza de atletas y sus logros.

No es lo mismo en la película de Ichikawa, en donde la belleza emerge en otro orden de cosas. En la Villa Olímpica, la plaza de alimentación es un ambiente que se confunde con un bar, con jazz de fondo; los competidores son vistos entreteniéndose, entrenando o cambiando de ropa. Al mismo tiempo, las cámaras buscan a un atleta de Chad, el solitario representante del país que hacía apenas cuatro años proclamaba su independencia de Francia. La mirada no es pintoresca pero sí solidaria, buscando sumergir en las dificultades de aquel sujeto que abría caminos. En este mismo sentido, y colocando la técnica al servicio de la expresión, *Olimpiadas de Tokio* elige rostros y expresiones, pausa en ellos, no duda frente al fracaso o a lo irrelevante, como ya fue mencionado, trabajándolos como elementos estéticos. Rechaza, con eso, la estetización de los cuerpos que, mientras tanto, es afirmada en *Olympia*. Los victoriosos son destacados, como los de la lucha olímpica, en que el triunfo de los japoneses sería fruto de su fuerza y determinación, o de la selección anfitriona de voleibol femenino en la difícil partida final contra las soviéticas, pero ahí también vemos la soledad del entrenador del equipo, por largos segundos en el banco de suplentes, sin sonreír o verse en celebración con otros, mientras las atletas conmemoran en la cancha.

Algo semejante pasa en la gimnasia, que destaca al campeón general, el japonés Yukio Endo, y al equipo local, liderado por él, que igualmente alcanzó la medalla de oro, además de la gran campeona femenina, Vera Caslavskaja, de la entonces existente Checoslovaquia. Pero, al contrario de lo que sucede con el atletismo, no hay narración, sino solamente imágenes y ellas también se refieren a los detalles, como las manos que se llenan de cal para mejorar el desempeño en la barra fija, o los rostros de las gimnastas en la ambivalencia entre el temor y la confianza, tan común en los deportes.

En verdad sorprende Ichikawa al abordar cada modalidad de forma particular. En el boxeo los colores son suspendidos y prevalece el negro y blanco, como en los muchos registros clásicos en película (Vowinkel, 2012) que ayudaron a componer el imaginario y la mitología de la modalidad. En las competencias de kayak ni un rostro es mostrado y siquiera llega a nuestro conocimiento quién habrá sido el vencedor, dado que lo que vemos son, principalmente, los remos en acción. En otros deportes, el abordaje es aún más radical, como en pentatlón moderno, del cual tenemos apenas imágenes fijas, fotos y tomas en montaje narrativa de las más interesantes. Sabemos quién fue quien llegó en el puesto 37º, pero no el campeón de la modalidad.

Tan interesante como la mirada de arriba es la documentación del judo, que se resume a mostrar la final de la categoría absoluto, entre el holandés Anton Geesink, de 1,98 metro de altura y 130 kilos de peso y el japonés Akio Kaminaga (19 centímetros más bajo y 28 kilos más liviano que su adversario). Habiendo sido ese deporte creado en Japón, y siendo aquella la primera vez en que aparecía en el programa olímpico, la disputa más importante generó gran expectativa, contando en la platea, incluso, con la presencia imperial. Los representantes locales habían vencido todas las categorías hasta entonces, pero en la más importante la victoria fue del holandés. La lucha, que duró nueve minutos en total, es mostrada en una larga compactación y con *closes* (primeros planos) diversos, hasta el golpe decisivo y los saludos finales entre los dos combatientes. No hay comentarios o justificativas, tampoco lamentos, sino respeto por el vencedor.

5. Finalización

Olympia y *Olimpiadas de Tokio* son películas que bien expresan el *Zeitgeist* del siglo veinte, en el cual el deporte juega un papel de los más singulares. Si la primera es uno de los puntos inaugurales de la educación visual deportiva hacia la grandeza de los cuerpos en potencia, la segunda pone una duda en tanta glorificación atlética: hay cuerpos que fallan, hay miradas que no se dejan hipnotizar por los grandes hechos, los deportistas son también – y antes de todo – limitados. Al incorporar una contradicción interna al deporte en su hacer estético, el documental de Ichikawa logra algo sorprendente: tomando en cuenta una práctica social que se estructura en la búsqueda del progreso en un régimen de temporalidad que Walter Benjamin (2010) conceptuó como lineal y vacío, lanza una crítica a dicho rumbo lineal e infinito. Encuentra con eso el mismo deporte al cual Riefenstahl se refirió, pero en otras de sus posibilidades. Con eso descubre en los gestos corporales otra belleza.

La belleza que las cámaras de Ichikawa capturan y producen es sucia, mientras las de Riefenstahl procuran ser insípidas e higiénicas. En *Olimpiadas de Tokio* podemos ver la hesitación, el esfuerzo,

el miedo, la sorpresa y la decepción, así como también movimientos de grandes atletas al borde de la perfección. El montaje, las transiciones, el ritmo, siempre en cinemascopio, permiten que la película sobre los Juegos en Japón desconcierte los cánones deportivos que su contraparte hecha en Berlín solamente refuerza. Como ya mencionado, Sontag (2011) apunta que *Olympia* es mucho más una obra sobre política que sobre deporte porque no destaca el irrenunciable empeño, sino que prefiere la pureza y la facilidad de los gestos. Si la gran ensayista tiene razón, entonces debemos a Ichikawa el logro de expresar la belleza como construcción imperfecta y fragmentaria, justo donde menos se espera que ella aparezca: en el deporte olímpico.

Como en los Juegos Olímpicos, este texto se termina con la maratón. Es la única ocasión en que los perdedores, con sus dolores y jornadas sin gloria, son claramente mostrados en *Olympia*. El primero en abandonar la carrera ostentaba el número 1 en la camiseta, ya que había sido el campeón cuatro años antes, en Los Ángeles, el argentino Juan Carlos Zabala. En 1964, su compatriota Osvaldo Suárez lideró la prueba al principio, pero fue el cuarto atleta en desistir, en un día en que ocurrieron muchas deserciones. Todo ese proceso es mostrado en ambas películas, así como las victorias, respectivamente, del japonés Kitei Son y del etíope Abebe Bikila.

Bikila hizo una prueba excepcional y las cámaras de *Olimpiadas de Tokio* se detienen en él, quien llegó al estadio muy por delante de sus adversarios y logró, aquel día, el récord mundial. El narrador también destaca la llegada del japonés Kokichi Tsuburaya en tercer lugar, recordando que la bandera de Japón no se alzaba en un estadio olímpico desde la victoria de Son en 1936. A diferencia de la mayoría de sus adversarios, varios de ellos protegidos por mantas térmicas por los voluntarios, vemos al bicampeón ejercitándose inmediatamente después de concluir la prueba. La presencia del etíope contrasta, sin embargo, con los menos famosos que, con frecuencia, paran en las mesas de abastecimiento para beber agua y refrescar el cuerpo, pero también para vomitar. Algunos disminuyen la velocidad, otros caminan, y hay quienes simplemente se detienen.

Hay muchas personas mirando la maratón y es posible ver a los atletas de cerca, algo que tal vez sería imposible, cuestiona el narrador de la película de Ichikawa, para aquellos que están en el estadio. Tal vez por eso haya tantos *closes* en los ojos de las personas en las tribunas, como si el director se preguntara cuanto un ser humano, contando apenas consigo mismo, sería capaz de ver. La respuesta la ofrece él mismo, con su película, que permite a la mirada ver más de lo que por sí sola conseguiría. Si Walter Benjamin (2013) tiene razón en decir que la cámara es una extensión del ojo y que aniquila una de las características de la vieja obra de arte – la distancia en relación a aquel que la aprecia –, entonces el deporte sería mucho menos de lo que es si no existiera el cine.

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The coach in a sport mega-event: the construction of the Luiz Felipe Scolari persona at the 2014 World Cup

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Abstract

Mega-events are important spaces for the construction of narratives, influencing social, cultural, economic, political and technological aspects. In this article, we analyze how the newspaper “O Globo” narrated the career of Luiz Felipe Scolari, coach of the Brazilian national team, during the 2014 World Cup. The analysis considered editions from the day after the call-up, the day of the first game and the day after the semi-final against Germany. We focused on reports in which the Brazilian national team was the main topic, investigating how Scolari was represented. “O Globo”, as part of the largest media conglomerate in Brazil, plays an important role in the construction of identities linked to soccer. The results show that the newspaper’s assessment of the coach was directly influenced by the team’s performance: until the defeat to Germany, the stories were positive, but after the result, they all became negative, revealing a clear link between the result and the narrative.

Keywords: Mega-events, World Cup, Brazil 2014, Coaches.

1. Introduction

The transformation of the figure of the sports coach is intrinsically linked to the changes we have seen in the symbolism of Mega-Events. Once events that promoted diplomacy between nations, now, they have a huge media apparatus and are linked to geopolitical, cultural, economic and technological issues. The amateur origins of coaches, who managed equally amateur teams and athletes, have been transformed into a function that aims to organize (professional) teams and athletes for victory. Today, this role focuses on using technological tools to get the most of athletes, the focus isn’t only on physical performance, but also on psychological preparation. In this sense, we understand that these changes are aimed at the high performance of athletes and teams in Mega-Events. Being the coach of a world champion team, for example, means not only

sporting prestige, but also symbolic capital in other social environments. Due to the strength of the symbology of sport, coaches have come to be seen as leadership models and are even used in commercials.

Just as Griggs and Gibbons (2012) observed, a proximity of an English cultural identity present in the narratives about the coach of the “English team”, seeking a glorious past and a “golden era”, we observed that the narrative of the newspaper “O Globo” follows this line in understanding that the Brazilian national team should have this relationship with the past idealized as magical, in the expression known as “football-art” (Mostaro, 2017). For this connection with the past, the actions of coach Scolari should follow a certain pattern that is based, among other factors, on winning.

According to Vicente et al. (2010), the World Cup is an important moment to observe the national constructions made by the media, more specifically by newspapers. Also according to Vicente et al. (2010), in this competition the concepts of Anderson’s “imagined community” (1983), Hobsbawm’s “invented traditions” (1983) and a habitus desired by the characters who play in this event, both players and, in our case, the coaches, clearly emerge. In narrative constructions in Brazil, we also observe a reductionist construction, framing certain events in order to arouse a direct relationship with national identity and thus emotionally choose culprits, as Vicente et al. (2010) observed in the construction of an “us vs. them” invective in blaming Swedish manager, Sven-Göran Eriksson, for England’s failure to win the World Cup 2006. In the case of our analysis, Scolari would have been responsible for losing the World Cup at home. It is also important to point out that, according to Borges et al. (2022), there is a polarization in the discourse about coaches, specifically in the performance of foreign coaches in other nations, who oscillate between being instrumental in sports development and success, or stigmatized as unsuccessful mercenaries with no ties to the host country. In our case, Scolari isn’t a foreigner, but his narrative indicated this polarization and the discussion about his succession brought up the importance of the Brazilian national team being coached by a foreigner, showing how this character is intrinsically linked to global narratives about sport and national identities.

Using the methodology of Critical Analysis of Narratives (Motta, 2013), our article will specifically analyze how Luiz Felipe Scolari, coach of the Brazilian national team at the 2014 World Cup, was presented in the Brazilian newspaper “O Globo”. This methodology understands that no narrative is naïve and that the elaboration of each narrative dialogues with the context and social imaginary in which it is elaborated. In a scenario permeated by the idea of consumption and the exacerbation of emotions and images that the Mega-Event (Freitas et al., 2014) gives rise to, we will understand this significant change in the construction of the image of a coach taking part in a Mega-Event. The object and corpus were chosen because the country was hosting the competition, creating expectations that the team would win, which directly interfered with the coach’s responsibility for the team’s performance. Specifically, because the coach is from the host country, there is also the issue of the country’s image and brand being exalted at Mega-Events, further impacting on the construction of the coach’s persona. What would be the main changes in this construction of the coach in the newspaper after losing a World Cup at home? The results indicate a neoliberal vision that permeates sport, blaming the individual for failure and demanding an infinite surplus of victories, especially during Mega-Events.

2. From Amateur Event to Mega-Event

Since the structuring of modern sport, following its practices has become an important ritual, linked to the expansion of capitalism and the new technologies that have shortened distances (Thompson, 1999). In this context, the affects, sounds and rhythms of sports practice were intertwined with a new sensory reordering that Modernity brought (Singer, 1995). Stadiums became spaces for urban stimuli and collective experiences. The mobilization of the masses around athletes and teams consolidated sport as a pillar of consumption, identity and representation in modern capitalist society. Thus, the search for sensory stimuli generated by sport has become a significant social, economic, political and technological event.

Sporting events have also become sites for disputing social narratives. The Modern Olympic Games, for example, arose to rescue values linked to amateurism and chivalry (Amaro, 2016). The exaltation of the nation and the sense of belonging promoted by the Games shaped the imagination of many countries, transforming the athletes' performance into intense preparation to raise the name of the nation they represent. The athletes' performance has come to symbolize, in the media, the success or failure of the nation.

In soccer, the first World Cup, held in Uruguay in 1930, followed the same logic, after a rupture between the IOC and FIFA. Mostaro (2019) points out that the Brazilian coach in the competition maintained the amateur characteristics of the sport in Brazil, with the doctor and former goalkeeper Pindaro de Carvalho being described as a "diplomatic representative", contrasting with the figure of Scolari in 2014.

Since Uruguay, the World Cup has become a global event full of national symbolism. As Crolley and Hand (2006) state, national identities are fluid and manifest themselves in specific scenarios; the World Cup is an arena where ideologies that connect country, culture and identity are produced and contested. This national culture, crystallized by the soccer team, is driven by the "media hysteria" surrounding the World Cup, which propagates narratives to engage the public and make them believe that the players represent an entire nation, its cultures and traditions (Helal, 2001). During this period, news coverage intensifies, using metaphors and emotive language to attract and entertain readers (Crolley & Hand, 2006).

Vicente et al. (2010) corroborate this view, stating that the World Cup reflects trends in the print media that globalize and commodify teams and sports stars, as in the case of Scolari in 2014. In this event, the media plays a crucial role in constructing, (de)constructing and reinforcing meanings, understandings and values that contribute to national identity (Whannel, 2008).

In Brazil, sporting competition has become a national ritual (Guedes, 1998), in which the idea of Brazil and what it means to be Brazilian is revisited at each event (Gastaldo, 2002). Heroes like Leônidas, in the 1938 World Cup, and myths like Gilberto Freyre's positive miscegenation (Mostaro & Helal, 2019), have shaped the national imagination. The 1950 defeat against Uruguay at the Maracanã was interpreted as a national defeat (Brinati, 2016), while the 1958, 1962 and 1970 victories were seen as redemption and exaltation of the country through soccer. The press constructed the image of the "country of soccer" (Helal, 2001), revealing disputes over narratives between social groups. According to Waag (2006), the myth of the coach, deeply rooted in soccer

culture, needs to be analyzed. The 7-1 defeat in 2014 shook up “art soccer”, showing the role of the coach between “heaven” and “hell”.

The World Cup Mega-Event will be the stage for these disputes and the climax of this character’s performance. Freitas et al. (2014) draw our attention to the interpretation that Mega-Events are important spectacles on the international stage and that they stir up narratives in the media before, during and after they take place. In this bombardment of information about this frame, the characters in evidence in this before, during and after deserve an analysis of how they were narrated in these contexts. This is close to the interpretation of (Crolley & Hand, 2006) the effusive media participation during the World Cups.

Still according to Mostaro (2019), the 1970 World Cup, the first to be broadcast via satellite to the whole world and which marked the idea of the “country of soccer”, saw a great deal of praise for coach Zagallo. In three newspapers analyzed from the day of the national team’s debut until a week after the end of the World Cup (22 days), Mostaro (2019) found 625 articles about the national team. 207 of them talked about Zagallo, which accounted for 33 percent of all the articles about the national team. By way of comparison, in the first eight competitions, this was the relation between news about the national team and news about the coach, following the methodology of analyzing three newspapers in each competition: 1930 (90/18), 1934 (57/11), 1938 (256/71), 1950 (176/47), 1954 (152/45), 1958 (401/85), 1962 (377/51), 1966 (217/42).

According to Mostaro (2019), in 1970’s World Cup, Zagallo establishes in the narratives, with more intensity, the technocratic vision (Herbert Chapman’s model of “organizing victory”) as an immediate reference to the concept of coach, as someone who will use available techniques and tools to “produce” victories. Inaugurating the desired profile for future competitions, in which the relationship between economics and sport will become more intrinsic. This will help us understand what is expected of a soccer coach at a World Cup and how elements of each country’s cultural identity will be used when narrating the coaches of these teams.

3. The Technician Between Capital and Labor

In the previous section, we showed how the coach played a quasi-diplomatic role in the events and how, with the change of the competition to a Mega-Event, the 1970 World Cup interfered with the amount of news about this character. In this section, we will emphasize how, in Brazil, the coach is part of this historical process of transforming events into Mega-Events, creating the fundamental bases for analyzing the narrative about Scolari.

In Brazil the growing social mobilization around sport, which encouraged more and more people to go to the stadiums, considerably increased the clubs’ income. These events and this popular mobilization came to be seen as big business. Winning went beyond the accumulation of symbolic sporting capital and led to an increase in the coffers of the clubs, which began not only to count on the young elite and amateurs in their clubs, but also to invite athletes considered technically better to join their team. With this reconfiguration, poor and black players received offers to change clubs. The equation was relatively simple: the more money, the more quality players, the more wins, the more people interested in the matches and, consequently, the more money...

This apparent economic simplicity of soccer faced conflicts between amateurism and professionalism. Amateurism was defended by sectors that saw soccer as a noble spirit, practiced for “pleasure”, a distinction from the “impure” athletes paid to play. Those in favor of professionalism saw the sport as a business that generated jobs and profits, attracting more and more fans. The national elite faced the dilemma of accepting capital and losing the “aristocratic essence” of sport, or maintaining their distinction and rejecting capital. The Brazilian decision followed the English model (Lever, 1983): the elite accepted professional players in exchange for retaining administrative control of soccer, including the choice of coaches. Holt (1989) notes that this professionalization limited the players’ negotiating power. de Melo et al. (2013) point out that amateurism exploited the players, and Santos (1981) sees this issue as a class struggle, where the bourgeois feared the rise of the proletarians in soccer.

We argue that the professionalization of the players, while maintaining the amateurism of the managers, transformed the figure of the coach. As Wagg (1984) points out, they acted as intermediaries between capital (the club) and labour (the players), being responsible for “organizing the team for victory” (Carter, 2006). In the event of defeats, they were held responsible, preserving the managerial structure. We believe that social interactions shape roles in Mega-Events, which are closely linked to the advance of capitalism. These events are rituals of great financial circulation, which emphasize ideologies of “winners” and “losers”. Neoliberal institutions create competitive scenarios and disseminate the valorization of performance, shaping subjectivity and promoting consumption and entrepreneurship as central goals (Laval, 2020). Since the 1970s, with neoliberalism (Dardot & Laval, 2014), establishing capitalist morality as a reference for daily interactions has become essential to consolidate “correct” actions in the social imaginary.

In this sense, the national identity in dispute during a Mega-Event is, unique, win. Not following what is expected can destroy the representation of a given individual. As Goffman says: “the audience appreciates the fact that the show has a director, and will probably consider him more responsible than the other actors for the success of the show” (Goffman, 2007, p. 95). In the representation of a nation at a World Cup, that director would be the soccer coach. More specifically, in sport, our character gains strength within the capitalist logic by having the following function: in the same way that factory owners tried to create tools to make their symbolic goods faster, more perfectly and more beautifully, the coach would be entrusted with this task in soccer. He would be “competent” if he managed to invent new tools with the aim of: being efficient, standardizing, measuring and moving towards progress (Postman, 1994, p. 51). This progress would be the team’s victory.

These changes in the social imaginary that neoliberalism induces will be reflected in the desired profile for football coaches. Thus, our article comes close to the interpretations of Vicent et al. (2010), mainly by understanding that this desired profile can be defined in Elias’ (1991) terms as “codes of being”. They would be a combination that articulates, in a complex way, imaginaries, memories and invented traditions that circulate in the subconscious and that can be activated by narratives that exalt national identity in a process that mixes different layers of individual and collective belonging and that reflect in this signification of national identity. As Vicente et al. (2010) reinforce, these different layers create the complex “network” of a person’s “code of being” and mean that they see their world through intersections of individual and collective lenses

or “I/we” identities, to produce national identity. In the neoliberal scenario that our article investigates, in addition to the formation of and pressures on the definition of national identity by local and national newspapers, there are also the transnational tensions imposed by globalisation. Hill (2009) interprets this tension as a tendency towards growing interdependence between new world markets and the diffusion of new ideas, technologies, products and resources that are reflected in new “codes of being” that threaten to subject this multiculturalism and national cultures to a global monoculture, which, in our interpretation, is strongly supported by neoliberal values.

In the increasingly global and media-driven World Cup Mega-Event, the pressures on national cultures increase the tensions placed on national identities (Harris, 2006). In other words, the coaches who were subject to the demands of a national identity linked to football, in the case of Brazil after 1970, to playing football-art (Mostaro, 2017), are now under pressure to collect victories and demonstrate practices associated with the neoliberal culture of managing victories in the arena of narrative dispute that is the World Cup. Following Wagg’s suggestion (2006), we can see that the effectiveness of football managers (coaches) has become the main factor in explaining the outcome of important matches - in our case, the World Cup. For better or worse, they have become mythical figures and world celebrities

4. Our “Tactical Map”

The social construction of the coach is recent, as Stephen Wagg (2006) points out, having emerged over the last 50 years. The modern myth of the “soccer manager” is seen as having a “magic wand” to win or a “rotten finger” to lose, with the media narrative oscillating between “heaven” and “hell”. The coach is seen as responsible for the interactions on the pitch, directly impacting the result, even without entering the field.

We observe the narrative of the newspaper “O Globo” about the coach of the national team at the 2014 World Cup, Luiz Felipe Scolari. This competition brought up some important points that were taken into account in our choice. It was the second time the country had hosted the event, 64 years after the 1950 World Cup. The 1950 World Cup carries an important symbolic charge in the national imagination because of the defeat that was considered “tragic”. Overcoming the “trauma” would be one of the tasks set by the newspapers for this coach. The national team, the biggest winners in the history of the Mega-Event with five titles (1958, 1962, 1970, 1994 and 2002) should have the competence to win playing at home. In the World Cup social frame, the role of representing the Brazilian national team had a very clear obligation: to be champions.

To decipher the movements of this character, our methodology combines content analysis and narrative analysis. Content analysis maps the intentions and actions of journalistic narratives in a specific context. With it, we identified qualitative associations between national team coaches and the number of reports. We chose the newspaper “O Globo”, part of the relevant media conglomerate Organizações Globo, which has covered the World Cup since 1930 and played a significant political role, supporting the 1964 civil-military coup (Fernandes, 2019; Soares, 2018; Cabral, 2022).

We analyzed “O Globo” from the time the national team was called up until the day after the semi-final against Germany in 2014, totaling five days of analysis. We considered the reports on the Brazilian national team and investigated the role of the coach, counting how many times he was mentioned in the reports and classifying these mentions as positive, negative or neutral (Feres & Sassara, 2016). Positive refers to the praising representation of the coach; neutral when it doesn’t change the narrative; and negative when it causes ruptures that blame the coach.

The second element of the methodology is the analysis of the narratives. According to Ricoeur (2010), the narrative is an interpretative tool that highlights the action of the subject in the production of meaning. Motta (2013) emphasizes that narrative creates worlds, and in this space of soccer disputes, newspapers classify characters who are relevant to social groups.

5. “Shame, Embarrassment, Humiliation”

The first day of analysis was May 7th, a crucial moment in the formation of the representation of the coach during the World Cup. By calling up the players, Scolari is presented as decisive, as evidenced by the cover of “O Globo”, which read: “Felipão’s 23”. This discursive construction reinforces Scolari’s responsibility for the national team. The report was considered positive, highlighting a photo of the smiling coach and stating: “There were no surprises, no disputes”. In a Brazilian soccer context, achieving a popular consensus on the squad is positive news. The narrative uses elements from the last World Cup that Scolari coached to emphasize his success: “Now he has taken to the streets and has been greeted” (“O Globo”, 05/08/2014, p.1).

The analysis continues with a description of the players’ grades, in which Scolari is called “boss” (“O Globo”, 08/05/2014, p.2). The supposed lack of experience of the squad is contextualized with memories of the 1970 and 2002 World Cups, which also had a similar number of debutants. These references seek to reactivate past achievements and create a relationship with the 2014 national team. Of the eight pages of the Sports section, seven stories talked about the national team and mentioned Felipão, four of them neutral and two positive, with no critical representations. The titles for the coach varied between “Felipão”, “boss” and “family”, all maintaining a positive narrative.

On the national team’s debut on June 12th, 2014, we found five articles focused on the national team, three of which focused on the coach, who was referred to as “Felipão” in all of them. These figures reinforce the coach’s significance in the current context of Mega-Events. He has more mentions than the national team’s main player, Neymar, reinforcing what Wagg (2006) pointed out about the coach becoming a media celebrity. Both took part in the press conference before the games, and one article highlighted Scolari’s phrase: “It’s our World Cup!” The portrait of the coach was positive, characterized as “a well of tranquility”.

Nothing like the irritable, tense character of 12 years ago, when the Brazilian team made their debut in the 2002 World Cup against Turkey (“O Globo”, 06/12/2014, p. 4). These assertions show the narrative nuances surrounding coaches throughout the World Cups. If, in 2002, we can suggest that he was represented, until he won the title, as an angry person with no patience for the press, this time the representation is shaped on a different level.

On page five, the newspaper takes a look back at the national team's career, from the time they were eliminated in the 2010 World Cup by the Netherlands in the quarterfinals to the last game before the opening match. After considering the team's performance poor under Mano Menezes, the previous coach, the narrative highlights that the turnpoint in the team's self-esteem came with Scolari:

The pressure was immense and seeing a World Cup played at home with a young team on the horizon was a terrifying scenario. The CBF turned to the last two world champions: Luiz Felipe Scolari as coach and Carlos Alberto Parreira as coordinator. [...] Then came June 30, 2013 and the consecrating 3-0 victory over mighty Spain, in a crazed Maracanã. The national team had regained international respect and popular passion. Felipão had subsequently appealed for public support. He had succeeded. It wouldn't be Brazil if peace didn't suffer a scratch from then until the World Cup. In Morumbi a week ago, the friendly against Serbia was met with boos and applause. Strictly speaking, much more applause than booing. Today, fate will be at stake ("O Globo", 06/12/2014, p. 5).

This excerpt illustrates the pendulum of the press' analysis of the national team and the coach's notoriety as being responsible for the results. The idea of describing the "rebirth" of the national team as an "enchantment", as well as affirming the recovery of "respect" and "passion" is motivated by a positive result. We suggest that the pressure on the coach is essentially defined by the result obtained on the pitch.

In this sense, it is important to emphasize that if Mega-events become places where victorious representations are exalted in the neoliberal context, the coach would be the specialist who brings efficiency and objectivity, with technical calculations on decisions during a game. The representative and symbol of this doctrine that places this efficiency and mastery of calculation as the guide to everyday interactions (Postman, 1994). The coach will be charged with the efficiency of indicating the best decisions for the players and their choices, which must always be satisfactory and lead to victory. In this way, Felipão would be the ideal manager to win the hexacampeonato.

With the 3-1 win over Croatia, the newspaper's Sports section has ten pages. Five articles were about the national team. Only one was about the coach, which we considered positive. Three highlighted the performances of Neymar and Oscar and one the controversial penalty awarded by Japanese referee Yuichi Nishimura. The coach received a seven from the newspaper. Referred to as "Felipão", his representation in the narrative is associated with the team's maturity and praise for Oscar: "During the game, Felipão squawked, complained about the referee and practically didn't sit down. In the post-match press conference, Felipão was calm, serene and, above all, relieved. After all, the nerves of his young team had been tested. And they passed" ("O Globo", 06/13/2014, p. 5).

The team drew 0-0 with Mexico in the second round and then beat Cameroon 4-1 to qualify top of their group. In the round of 16, the team beat Chile on penalties and progressed to the quarter-finals. They beat Colombia 2-1 to qualify for the semi-finals. Despite this, the narrative highlighted Neymar's lower back injury, which ruled him out of the World Cup. The days before the match against Germany were focused on finding alternatives to Neymar's departure. Once again, the decision rests with the coach. How to set up the team without our main player? According to the intrigue in the narrative, one wrong move in the line-up could cost us elimination and the blame would immediately fall on Scolari.

On July 8th, 2014, the front page of the newspaper highlighted the mystery of the coach's announcement of Neymar's replacement: "Without Neymar, Felipão hides the game". On the 12 pages of the Sports section, five articles talked about the national team. Of these five, four featured Felipão and one dealt with Neymar (highlighting his sponsors' publicity surrounding his departure from the World Cup). Of the four that talked about Felipão, we considered all to be neutral and followed the theme of the coach's decision to set the starting line-up. It is worth noting that in the upper section of six of the newspaper's twelve pages we find predictions from journalists, artists and politicians for the match: of the thirty opinions, none believed in the team's elimination.

The stadium popularly known as Mineirão was the scene of the biggest defeat ever suffered by the national team in its almost 100-year history. After 28 minutes of play, Germany were leading 5-0. The final score was a ruthless 7-1. Such a scoreline would be a break in the representation of the national team as "best in the world", widely disseminated by narratives over the decades and which has always served as a "remedy" for World Cup defeats (Gastaldo, 2002).

The front page of "O Globo" features a word that refers to the well-known "Maracanazo", now with a derivation that alludes to the torturers of 2014: "Mineirätzen". Other words in the narrative try to summarize the meanings that the defeat caused to one of the most widespread national symbols: the national team. "Shame, embarrassment, humiliation".

The narrative on page three recalls the 1950 defeat and redefines it as honorable, compared to the context of the 7-1. By "rereading" the narrative of 1950, the journalistic narrative is removed from the status of vexation, since the symbolism of the 7-1 becomes more empathic than the 2-1 loss to Uruguay in 1950. In addition, the same report points to a loss in soccer's national identity and the need to think more about its organization and control. On page six, the questions continue along the same lines and focus the analysis on the lack of management by the coach who hasn't "modernized".

On page 4, the article highlights coach Felipão's press conference. According to the narrative his responses show a coach disconnected from the reality on the pitch, raising questions about the tactical backwardness of national coaches. Blaming Felipão for the defeat intensified, and one article compared the 1950 defeat to the "humiliation" of 7-1, characterizing the 2014 team as "Felipão's team". Of the 16 pages of the Sports section, eight articles dealt with the national team, with three focusing negatively on Felipão, which marks a change in the narrative. This new representation suggests that he was mainly responsible for the defeat, showing a relationship between the result and the perception that national soccer is lagging behind European soccer.

6. Conclusion

We start from the idea that through framing, choices, angles and communicational discourse that it is possible to make an idea common to society and regulate the social meaning of certain representations. No narrative is naïve; it fulfills a certain purpose, constructing and distributing roles to each character in an individualized way. We understand that the chosen newspaper developed its narrative as if it were part of the team. After all, in a competition like the World Cup, Brazilian identity is at stake, and the newspapers forge their narratives based on this identity, since it is what attracts the attention and excitement of the fans in this Mega-Event that can be

considered a simulacrum of a “duel between nations”. This association was confirmed by analyzing the content of the reports. The number of positive and neutral articles outnumbered the negative ones during the call-up period, the preparation period and during Brazil’s victories. As a member of Organizações Globo, which owns the rights to broadcast the competition, it is pertinent that the newspaper encourages optimism about the national team. Especially if we consider the amounts invested in acquiring the television rights to cover this Mega-Event. The narrative is shaped within this context, choosing actions that contribute to the representation, since the newspaper is part of the “party”.

We noticed that, with the defeat, the criticism in “O Globo” became more pronounced and the news considered negative became the focus. Of course, we didn’t expect praise for Scolari’s work after the unusual scoreline for a match between teams with such tradition. However, by playing the role of mediator of the social imaginary about soccer, the press is once again reinforcing the “common sense” of blaming the coach for the adverse results. In the neoliberal logic that the coach has assumed since the 2000s, the coach is a fragile side of the representation, and will be removed because will be easily changed, while the central structure that moves national soccer remains, trying at all costs to preserve the hegemonic representation, avoiding deep damage, which would incite a reorganization of the social structure of CBF.

Our work is in dialogue with Carter’s research (2006), which suggests that football managers are part of today’s celebrity culture. They are emblematic figures that the public believes have magical powers: “the public face of their clubs who somehow possess mystical powers” (Carter, 2006, p. 1). Our contribution is important because it highlights how the so-called “football country” approaches the coach during a World Cup set against the backdrop of Mega-Events.

The results obtained on the representation of Felipão in the newspaper “O Globo” are in line with Carter’s conclusion: “Yet the job of a football manager is a paradox. Few occupations are as volatile or as pressurised, and failure ultimately results in the sack” (Carter, 2006, p. 1). This paradox can be seen in the exaltation of Scolari before the defeat, as he is, according to our analysis, a representative of the nation and of Brazilian identities that are placed in the arena of disputed narratives that is a World Cup. In the neoliberal scenario of Mega-Events, this performance is cultural identity and also consumption and results. With defeat, the coach is immediately blamed and removed from this representation, as a strategy to avoid hurting this identity and save the representation. The nation lost, but it was the fault of an individual and not the collective. The identity needs to remain intact and saved. Something similar can be found in the analysis of England’s 2006 World Cup defeat, where Vicent et al. (2010) point out that although the players were not immune to criticism, Swedish coach Eriksson was largely blamed for the narratives, which were based on negative Swedish stereotypes and were impregnated with xenophobia. In other words, the coach who would be glorified if he won, was angered if he lost, because he was the element that tarnished the mythical past of the two teams, who didn’t play according to the “invented traditions” and, in the case of Brazil, tarnished the football-art and the Brazilian tradition in the World Cup, so emphasized by the national press.

In addition to this stain on identity, his being a media celebrity also suggests interpretations that were not seen between the 1930 and 1970 World Cups (Mostaro, 2019). The sudden change from positive to negative news after the defeat points to a congruence with Wagg’s work (2006). There is an element of hatred in the veneration that ordinary people devote to celebrities, a hatred

resulting from the social and emotional subordination that celebrity culture entails. Scolari became a celebrity during the 2002 World Cup when he won the tournament for Brazil. In 2014 he shared with Neymar the role of poster boy and celebrity for the brands sponsoring the World Cup in Brazil. He becomes a celebrity and associates his image with certain products and services. What had previously been an important marketing move, by linking the brand to a possible world champion, resulted in all the advertising featuring Scolari being withdrawn after the 7-1 defeat. There is no nation-selection relationship here, but rather a consumer-victory relationship. The brands immediately tried to disassociate themselves from the coach who, in the event of victory, would be exalted to the extreme in order to exalt the brands as well.

As Wagg (2006) points out, the emotionally volatile nature of celebrity culture is particularly evident in the myth of the football manager and this is what we found in our corpus. Belief in a coach's talents quickly dissipates in the event of defeat. The coach who could have been competent becomes discredited. Exactly what happened in the case of the adverts that were seen in the newspapers until the day of the match and disappeared the next day. Here Wagg's conclusion (2006) becomes clear: both celebrity and football coaching are socially constructed phenomena; both represent, in a real sense, a substitution for democracy and both can be quickly destroyed by removing, metaphorically or symbolically, the accessories that surround them.

Football culture has created the myth of the football manager because he serves the interests of all the parties involved: administrators, club owners, the media, players, ex-players and aspiring technocrats. And this paradigm is useful because, at any moment in the life of an important team, the explanation for that team's performance can be reduced to a single determining factor: the work of its coach. This is exactly what we concluded when analysing the newspaper's representation of Scolari. Of course, we don't want to conclude that Scolari has no quality, what we want to emphasise is, following Wagg's conception (2006), that in the current discourse, guided by the results, the analysis of the defeat has the coach as the only locus, as if he were a social actor outside of any context. All other factors and structural nuances, although not entirely ignored, are minimized.

In short, defending the collective identity, the "imagined community" and "invented tradition" of the Brazilian national team is "throwing the coach to the lions". By changing one part, the collective identity is preserved, the blame falls on a single individual, saving this identity, this imaginary of the "country of soccer", which, if lost, would destroy the entire representation that underpins media constructions about Brazil's participation and expectations in a World Cup.

After the 2014 defeat, the frisson about changes in national soccer was present in the media narratives after the competition. Among the many arguments put forward for a "rescue" of the "best in the world" imaginary, the choice of a foreign coach to "revolutionize" national soccer tactically was among the most intensely debated, evidencing what Borges, Rosado and Oliveira (2022) have already indicated. Spain's Pepe Guardiola, successful at Barcelona, was mentioned as "the" person for such a "challenge", since his name is associated with talented teams, set up to play offensively and with a touch of the ball. The CBF announced the return of Dunga, the coach who had previously led the national team from 2006 to 2010. Debates about the "modernization" of national soccer cooled down, and Dunga's first positive results in charge of the national team relegated the debate and criticism to the background.

A few months after taking over, Dunga failed to achieve the expected victories and was sacked. The neoliberal logic returns: the coach who doesn't fulfill his role of "win, win, win" is the one who fails at infinite optimization in all spheres of life. Like Scolari, he would be a "failure" in the face of the world's excessive competition.

Coach Tite took over and led the national team at the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. The negative news only came after the defeat in 2022, largely because the coach symbolized, as Mostaro and De Marchi (2001) pointed out, an authentic representative of the neoliberal game. The Brazilian national team will arrive at the 2026 World Cup having gone 24 years without a title, intensely emptying the representation of "best in the world". In the World Megavento, the Brazilian team "didn't wear the shirt" of victory, "tarnishing its representation", but electing the coach as the culprit for this failure, individualizing such results, reinforcing a negative approach to this character in the narratives about these events, leaving the structure of the entity unchanged.

This article is intended to stimulate further research into this important figure in soccer and Mega-Events: the coach. How is he narrated in other nations? What is his share of the blame in defeat and glory in victory? Is the coach a disposable piece in the game of representations, something unique to Brazil, or has it become a global standard? Is this neoliberal doctrine present in the narratives of other sporting events? These questions can guide future research on this subject and confirm the importance of the study presented here on how Mega-Events rework the profiles and expectations of the characters who are part of this event.

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Marta versus Neymar: the “war of the sexes” at the 2016 Olympic games in the narratives of sports journalism in Brazil

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Abstract

When the men’s and women’s football teams participate simultaneously in the same or different competitions, it is common for Brazilian sports journalism to construct narratives based on the comparison between the performance of both teams. At the 2016 Olympic Games, this phenomenon set up a kind of ‘war of the sexes’ staged in the narratives of important newspapers in the country and even chanted in the stadium stands. The protagonists of this duel were the players Neymar and Marta, both number 10 of the Brazilian men’s and women’s teams, and both national and international idols. This article aims to analyse this ‘war of the sexes’. For this purpose, we chose the press coverage of the 2016 Games by the newspapers *O Globo* and *Folha de São Paulo*, two of the most traditional periodicals in Brazil and those with the largest national circulation.

Keywords: Sports journalism, 2016 Olympic Games, Marta, Neymar.

1. Introduction

This article aims to analyse sports press coverage of the women’s national football team participation in the 2016 Olympic Games, held in Rio de Janeiro. *O Globo* and *Folha de São Paulo* were the chosen newspapers, based on the fact that they are the two most widely read periodicals throughout Brazil¹. These newspapers were used as sources for extraction and production of data. The newspapers were carefully read and the articles were analysed and interpreted based on sociological, anthropological and journalistic studies. We started from the simultaneous procedures of data collection and analysis, thus allowing for the construction of analytical codes

¹ Information from Instituto Verificador de Comunicação (IVC).

and categories from the data and not from pre-established hypotheses (Charmaz, 2009). Following Strauss and Corbin (2008), we emphasise that we understand data as a series of varied materials such as “interviews, field notes [...] and other forms of written and illustrated materials [...] We isolate the data and work with photos, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and other segments of materials” (2008, p. 66). For this article, we resorted to the material produced by *Folha de São Paulo* and *O Globo*, from 04 to 21 August 2016, period in which the gold medal of the Olympic football was disputed. Methodologically oriented, we built the assumption that the coverage of the participation of the women’s and men’s football teams in the 2016 Games staged what we call a “war of the sexes”, implying the existence of a frequent discursive resource that compared the performances of the women’s and men’s football teams in the 2016 Games. At least until the 2019 World Cup, the Olympic Games were the moment – it could be said the only one, until then – in which the women’s national football team got plenty of media attention². We interpret abundant media attention as the women’s national team having its games gaining repercussion, coverage by news media and analysed by the most relevant communication channels, as well as the possibility of having its games broadcasted by the main free-to-air television channel in Brazil³.

This study is basically interested in analysing the dramatization of what we call the ‘war of the sexes’, Marta versus Neymar, which occurred in the pages of *Folha de São Paulo* and *O Globo* in the 2016 Olympics media coverage. Firstly, the possibility of this media staging took place because the women’s team achieved visibility, basically, in a competition that is not exclusive to it, as is the case of the Olympic Games, a tournament in which men’s and women’s teams participate concomitantly. This fact allowed people to build the stories of the matches played by women and men national teams from the comparison between the two football performances during the Olympic Games. It is a discursive game in which women are more likely to lose than win. This is because the measure of sports excellence, in journalism, has men as a parameter (Moreira, 2013). No wonder Marta was called for a long time ‘Pelé in skirts’ (Costa & Helal, 2022).

It is noteworthy that in this mega-event that journalism turns its attention to other sports, going beyond men’s football, a modality that practically monopolises Brazilian’s sports coverage.⁴ It is true that this privilege granted to football is explained, to a large extent, by the central place that this sport holds not only in the sporting trajectory of the country, but also by the role it played in the process of building a nation, a phenomenon that became robust in the 1930s (Souza, 2008). It is worth highlighting the importance acquired by the Brazilian men’s national team and its participation in World Cups, an event that was configured for Brazil in a cycle of national rituals in which the country tells significant stories about itself (Guedes, 2023). Roberto DaMatta (2006), in a classic text, defended that the Olympic Games would not raise the same interest as the World Cups and, therefore, would not have the same ritualistic role of creating meanings about Brazil.

² Due to space limits, we will not go deeper into questions relating to the difficult trajectory of women’s football in Brazil. This practice was prohibited from 1941 to 1979 and only in 1983 did the Brazilian Football Confederation institutionalize the practice. This prohibition generated – and still generates – many obstacles to the development of this sport at a professional level. On this issue, see Bonfim (2019) and Kessler, Costa, & Pisani (2022).

³ In 2019, for the first time the games of the women’s national team in a World Cup were broadcasted by Rede Globo, the most important free-to-air television channel in Brazil.

⁴ On this subject, see Souza, Capraro, & Jensen (2017).

In fact, they are two mega-events that, for many reasons, receive different treatments in Brazil⁵. However, the 2016 Olympic Games presented specificities that contributed to making it an important moment in which Brazilians also told stories about themselves in discourses linked to this mega-event. It is worth asking: what were the possible meanings of these stories, their main characters, and themes.

In media coverage, the aforementioned “war of the sexes” worked as a narrative resource that managed to emulate a competition, which amplified the possibility of conferring drama and emotion, elements so typical and valued by the narratives of sports journalism in Brazil (Oselame, 2012; Costa, 2020). In addition to these aspects, to fulfill the objective of this article, we must consider that the symbolic dispute between the main athletes of the Brazilian football teams also echoed in the stands of the stadiums and in social media, which was an important motivator for newspapers to focus on this theme. The “war of the sexes”, Neymar versus Marta, as already said, fed on the comparison between the performance of the men’s and women’s national football teams, but, also, brought to the scene struggles that go far beyond the football pitches. In part, this “war of the sexes” dialogued with another war, the cultural one, fuelled by right-wing extremism, represented by Bolsonarism⁶, based on a warlike worldview and the defence of the customs agenda contrary to various struggles of social movements in Brazil (Rocha, 2020). It is important to say that Neymar, who has never been voted the best player in the world by FIFA, earns significantly more than Marta, who has been named the best player in the world five times. Neymar appears on social media as a “playboy” with little regard for social causes, having campaigned twice for a far-right candidate. In contrast, Marta is a dedicated advocate for women’s football.

In this context, gender issues have become the target of intense attack by the far-right, which, to a large extent, is also a conservative reaction to the strengthening of a ‘feminist consciousness’, that is, the women’s own perception that they are part of a group that occupies a subordinated social position and that this condition is not natural to them, but socially and historically determined (Lerner, 2022). This feminist consciousness that leads to the collective claim of rights previously denied has been a remarkable phenomenon in Brazilian daily life and the sports have played a valuable role in disseminating ideas and encouraging women’s actions. Recently, there have been many questioning and protests directed at sexism in the national football environment, which reverberate in social media and are often supported by marketing actions of various Brazilian clubs (Bertoncello, 2022). At the organizational level, the former player Aline Peregrino stands out, who became the director of the modality in the São Paulo Football Federation, managing, during her administration, to develop a work of reinvigoration of the competitions and the teams. We can highlight the role of female fans who, by social media and in the stands, demand respect and security against harassment (Bandeira, 2019; Rodrigues, 2022). The same type of gesture can be seen in sports newsrooms in actions such as the video manifesto *Deixa Ela Trabalhar* [Let Her Work] an initiative that united, in 2018, 52 female sports journalists, including presenters, reporters, producers, and advisors (Meireles, 2022). We highlight the emergence of communication channels focused exclusively on news about women’s football, as

⁵ In games of the men’s national team in World Cups, it is customary to decree an optional work day in Brazil, for example.

⁶ We understand Bolsonarism as the far-right political phenomenon that emerged in Brazil with the gradual increase in popularity of Jair Bolsonaro that culminated in his election to the presidency of the Republic in 2018. On the phenomenon of Bolsonarism, see: Souza (2019); Rocha (2021).

is the case of ESPNW, from 2016, and the Brazilian portal *Dibradoras*, created in 2015 (Gonçalves, 2021; Fon, 2022). In the traditional television media, it is now noticeable a greater presence of women narrating, commenting, and acting as reporters in various football championships. Therefore, many of these changes derive from demands arising in Brazilian society. It would not be an exaggeration to state that a kind of “footballing feminism” – or even sporting feminism – has manifested itself in Brazil in the last 10 years, which means that football has been an important arena for debates, visibility, and promotion of actions linked to agendas on gender equity and its intersectional aspects, not restricted to sport, but that resonate in society as a whole. This article will initially focus on analysing the media discourse surrounding the participation of the Brazilian men’s and women’s football teams in the most important sporting event in the world, which, in 2016, had Brazil as its headquarters. This analysis will be guided by the Neymar x Marta dispute discursively forged by the sports press. Next, this work will seek to provide a short overview of the appropriation of the Brazilian team’s yellow-green jersey by the extreme right. Both before and during the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games a period of rise of the far-right extremism can be observed in Brazil (Damo, 2020)⁷. In this sense, the media narratives about the 2016 Olympic Games also offer an opportunity to reflect on a troubled political-ideological moment that Brazil went through. Given the relevance of this issue, we will briefly look at 2019 when the Women’s World Cup and the men’s Copa América were held simultaneously. In this context, the Neymar x Marta clash takes on new meanings, especially considering the fact that the former declared support for Jair Bolsonaro. Marta, although she did not express support for any candidate, maintained her image linked to progressive agendas by participating in advertising campaigns to combat violence against women and engaging in the fight for equal pay in football. In this scenario, the Brazilian men’s team was the target of several expressions of rejection while the women’s team, with Marta as the main character, was referenced as a possibility of maintaining and renewing emotional ties with the yellow-green jersey, an important symbol of national identity.

2. The “war of the sexes” Marta *versus* Neymar in the sports pages of *O Globo* and *Folha de São Paulo*

At the 2016 Olympic Games, the women’s national football team began its participation even before the opening of the event. In the coverage of the national team’s arrival in the city of Manaus, Amazonas, for the match against South Africa, the warm reception of the players at the airport was highlighted by the fans cheering: “Marta is better than Neymar” (Mansur, 2016)⁸. But it was in the men’s game of Brazil *versus* Iraq that comparisons between Marta and Neymar took on more consistency and reverberation. The name Marta was shouted in chorus by a large part of the audience present at the Mané Garrincha Stadium in Brasília, which the newspaper *O Globo* announced: “In the 0-0 against the Iraqis, (the men’s team) were booed first. Then the team was humiliated with shouts of ‘olê’, ‘Marta’, and a melancholic ending: shouts of ‘Iraq’ in Brasília”

⁷ On the rise of far-right extremism in Brazil, see: Pinheiro-Machado (2019).

⁸ Football was the only sport that went beyond the borders of Rio de Janeiro, the host city of the event. The games of the Brazilian national teams also took place in the cities of Manaus, São Paulo, Salvador, Brasília, and Belo Horizonte.

(Mansur, 2016, p. 12). If on the one hand having her name called can be understood as a form of compliment to Marta, on the other we can also take this attitude as a type of provocation to Neymar, when the crowd insinuates that a woman should be playing in his place. It is difficult to know what the intention of the fans was, but *O Globo*, at least at first, decided to interpret that shout as one of the several examples of embarrassment or even humiliation undergone by the men's national team in that match.

The comparison between Marta and Neymar gained more momentum with the dissemination of the image of a child dressed in a yellow and green shirt of the men's national team in which Neymar's name appears crossed out and, in its place, Marta's handwritten name appears. The child in question was Bernardo Sampaio Silva, who was filmed by a Games volunteer while watching the judo competition at the Olympic Park in Rio de Janeiro. This episode was widely commented on, stimulating the movement on social media, which turned into an arena of disputes of groups that expressed themselves favorable and others opposed to the exaltation of Marta at the expense of Neymar⁹. Here it is important to mention that this duel dialogued with the turbulent political context of the time. We refer to the impeachment process of the then President Dilma Rousseff, who, during the Games, was removed from office, being replaced by her vice-president, Michel Temer¹⁰. Moreover, the good results of the women's national team in the competition and the weak performances of the men's team marked the clash Marta *versus* Neymar, which, in the discourse of the sports media, was received in a varied and ambiguous way.



Fig 1. Bernardo Sampaio Silva with the name Marta written on the shirt of the Brazilian men's national team¹¹.

In the edition of *O Globo* that was sold in the newsstands on the day of the Brazil vs Denmark match, the sports section of this newspaper asked the following question "Will Neymar become Marta? Secure the place or dive for good into the crisis". (*O Globo*, 2016, p. 8). Again, the

⁹ Menino troca nome de Neymar por Marta em camisa da seleção e viraliza | Blog Brasil Mundial FC | Globoesporte.com (<https://ge.globo.com/blogs/especial-blog/brasil-mundial-fc/post/crianca-troca-nome-de-neymar-por-marta-em-camisa-e-viraliza-ajude-nos-acha-lo.html>)

¹⁰ On the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff see: Souza, Jessé. *A Radiografia do Golpe*. São Paulo: Leya, 2016.

¹¹Source: (<https://ge.globo.com/blogs/especial-blog/brasil-mundial-fc/post/crianca-troca-nome-de-neymar-por-marta-em-camisa-e-viraliza-ajude-nos-acha-lo.html>)

comparison with Marta is drawn as something negative for Neymar, a fact that is evident when we continue to read the text and are faced with the following comment: “The phase is so bad that after two goalless draws against South Africa and Iraq, the Brazilian fans got sick of the national team. To the point that Neymar had to hear, in every game, that Marta, from the women’s team, should take shirt number 10” (O Globo, 2016, p. 8). The next day the same newspaper published an article about the preparation of the women’s national team for the match against Australia, in which the qualification for the semifinals of the Olympic competition would be at stake. However, in this report, the main concern shown by the newspaper was not with the female players, but with Neymar and the criticism of which he was being targeted, when being compared to Marta (O Globo, August 11, 2016). In this text, the request that would have been made by Marta for the fans to be more understanding with the men’s national team, especially its star player, Neymar, stands out.

Folha de São Paulo built less superficial narratives, seeking at times to understand the various issues raised by the constant comparisons between Marta and Neymar. In their approaches, the frequent mention of the affection of the fans with the women’s national team, especially Marta, is highlighted: “Fans consecrate Marta in a night of victory” (August 7, 2016). Later, the newspaper highlights the good audience present at the stadium and the fact that “from the stands, the shirt number 10 of the women’s national team heard that she plays more than the shirt number 10 of the men’s national team: ‘Marta is better than Neymar’” (Rizo, 2016, p. B8). Two days later, the newspaper highlights the affection for Marta shown by some fans and, in addition, denounces the financial abyss that separated the two teams, which would mirror the disparity in the structure of modalities in Brazil and the inequality of gender treatment in sports (Seto, 2016).

The concern with gender inequality in sports is also explicit in the approach of other modalities, such as the case of the article about the gold medallist in judo Rafaela Silva, who had been victim of racist attacks on the internet. In addition to this prejudice, attention is drawn to the fact that “Rafaela Silva also faced sexism. The gold-medallist in judo comments on the difficulties to advance in the sport” (Folha de São Paulo, August 10, 2016). In the same issue, the phenomenon called “Olympic feminism” by the same newspaper stands out (Folha de São Paulo, August 10, 2016), which would have been awakened by the success of women’s football, the gold medal of Rafaela Silva, and the gesture of Bernardo Sampaio Silva. This ‘Olympic feminism’, according to the *Folha de São Paulo*, was evident in the various manifestations – especially in social media – favorable to greater visibility and appreciation of women’s participation in the 2016 Games and by extension in sport (Folha de São Paulo, August 10, 2016).

Bernardo Sampaio Silva’s image illustrates the text where an interesting statement is quoted, in which the boy affirms that “Marta is the symbol of feminism in Brazil” and that “Marta deserves this shirt much more than Neymar” (Folha de São Paulo, August 10, 2016)¹². It is also noteworthy the chronicle “*Protagonismo das Mulheres*” (Protagonism of women) by Edgar Alves, which highlights the fact that, since Beijing 2008, Brazil’s most relevant results in the Olympic Games have come from female athletes competing individually or collectively. According to the columnist, this successful history is recent and was made possible, to a large extent, by the participation of women “who have been growing in the national delegations at each Olympic

¹² The video with Bernardo Sampaio Silva’s testimony can be accessed at: <https://noticias.bol.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/olimpiadas/2016/08/09/sai-ney-mar-entra-marta-menino-dono-de-camisa-e-fa-dos-dois-mas-pede-raca.htm>

event, standing out among the countries with the largest number of athletes of this gender” (Folha de São Paulo, August 13, 2016).

However, these approaches to women’s football do not mean that the men’s national team has taken a back seat in the coverage of *Folha de São Paulo*. Mentions of the shouts of “Marta” that appear among the fans at the men’s national team games are also treated with negative connotations, as occurs, for example, when the sports page reports “with shouts of Marta, Brazil ties again” (Folha de São Paulo, August 8, 2016). Later, the article states that: ‘In the middle of the game, the fans protested with irony asking for the entrance of Marta, ace of the women’s national team’ (Folha de São Paulo, August 8, 2016). Nevertheless, in the case of Folha, it is noteworthy that the comparison “Marta better than Neymar” is also highlighted when made by the fans present at the matches of the women’s national team, which gives a positive meaning to the gesture of the public: “Fans consecrate Marta in a night of victory for Brazil. In the 5-1 victory over the team of Sweden, in the Engenhão Stadium, the audience shouts that the athlete is better than Neymar” (Folha de São Paulo, August 7, 2016).

One of the strong motivations for the sports press to invest in the Marta *versus* Neymar duel was supported by symmetrically opposed campaigns, in the first phase of the competition. While the women’s team played good games and won, the men’s team disappointed by hardly making through the first stage and by showing a poor technical performance. However, the trajectory of both teams changes. The men’s team picked up a pace of ascent by reaching the final against Germany, winning the gold medal for the first time in history. The women’s team remained in the competition after a match led to a penalty shootout decision, however, they were eliminated by Sweden in the semifinals of the competition¹³. After this result, in the newspaper *O Globo*, in fact, the women’s team was mentioned again, only because of another defeat, this time to Canada and the consequent loss of the bronze medal: “Bronze runs away and Brazilian players appeal for support” (*O Globo*, Bronze escapa e jogadoras, 2016, p. 9). And if the attention paid to the men’s team was already greater – even in the defeats – with the consecutive victories, the gazes were turned back to them, especially focused on Neymar, and thus monopolising the Games coverage. Both the figure of Marta and the women’s team fell into an oblivion. And once again the result on the pitches is configured as a fundamental factor for the construction of narratives around the men’s national team (COSTA, 2020). If before *O Globo* even used an alarmist tone when it stated, “Football on the brink of a tragedy” (August 8, 2016), when the first victory of the men’s team came, the discourse gained exacerbated tones: “From zero to the ball” (August 11, 2016)¹⁴. These superlative headlines continue until the team earned the gold medal, which was greeted as follows: “King of diamonds. Against Germany, with penalties decision and art by Neymar. Thus Brazil ended the curse that lasted 64 years without the Olympic title” (August 21, 2016).

At *Folha de São Paulo*, the elimination of the women’s national team by Sweden was reported highlighting the presence of 70,000 people at the Maracanã stadium who had braved a hot day in Rio de Janeiro to watch the match (Mariante, 2016). When losing the bronze medal, the newspaper proposes an analysis of the future of the women’s national football team based on the hypothesis that “The new generation of the women’s national team proves that it deserves trust”

¹³ Brazil x Australia 0:0 (7:6, Penalties), Brazil x Sweden 0:0 (3:4, Penalties), Brazil x Canada 1:2, fourth place for Brazil.

¹⁴ The headline ‘Football on the brink of tragedy’ refers to Brazil 0 vs Iraq 0; whereas “From zero to the ball” refers to Brazil 4 vs Denmark 0.

(Seto, 2016, p. B6). The article focused on the need to maintain the investment – although acknowledging it as low – and the structure offered for training for the women’s national team, in preparation for upcoming Olympic Games. The men’s team, in turn, continued to be addressed in news in both newspapers even after the Olympics ended. This was not only because the team won the gold, but because the men’s team is always addressed in news, whether losing or winning¹⁵. The media attention given to women provoked a short-lived ‘disorder’, since the conquest of the men’s national team reinstated the predominant order in football and that concerns the privilege of masculinity as the basis from which the national footballing identity is built (Wood, 2018).

The triggering of the comparison between Marta and Neymar is a complex phenomenon that points to the valorisation of the female athlete, especially when it is said that “Marta is better than Neymar”, but also points to the use of her name as a way to provoke and offend Neymar, which is evinced in the pieces of news by *O Globo*. In any case, the insistence of much of the Brazilian sports media on building Marta’s image based on constant comparison with the performance of men is quite questionable (Lines, 2010). It is also noteworthy that the player, although much mentioned, was not a frequent presence in the photographs that accompanied the media coverage analysed here. The opposite occurred with Neymar, omnipresent both in the written text and in the photos that sought to translate the feelings of pain, concern, and joy that usually set the tone for the emotional speeches that usually surround the approaches of the sports facts linked to the men’s national team.

¹⁵ The Brazilian national team is often the target of much attention from the sports media, even when it loses. On this matter, see: Costa (2020).



Fig 2. Day after the gold medal was won by the men's national football team. First page of the Rio 2016 section, *Folha de São Paulo* (August 21, 2016).



Fig 3. Day after the gold medal was won by the men's national football team. First page of the Rio 2016 section, *O Globo* (August 21, 2016).

3. Beyond press coverage: “Neymar x Marta”

The holding of the 2016 Olympic Games in Brazil is the result of an effort undertaken since the 1990s when the country began to make the candidacy to become the headquarters of mega-events an explicit public policy goal, which implied the joint commitment of the three spheres of power: Municipal, State, and Federal (Mascarenhas, 2010). The years of preparation and realization of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Games accompany a period of rise of the extreme right, in Brazil, which had a relevant moment in the “*Jornadas de Junho*” (June demonstrations). “*Jornadas de Junho*” is how a set of demonstrations that brought millions of people to the streets of major Brazilian cities was called. Initially, the agenda of the protests focused on reducing the price of public transport, with the presence of several social segments. However, the progressive demands were gradually losing strength as local governments met the demands for a reduction in the price of bus tickets. Against the background of the demonstrations were the contradictions represented by the high degree of demands of FIFA and the IOC for Brazil to host the Confederations Cup¹⁶, the World Cup, and the Olympic Games, mega sports events that demanded billionaire expenses from a country that was in the process of economic ascent and international prestige, but that still kept the historical structures maintainers of inequality little changed (Reis, 2021). Nevertheless, as the marches took more people to the streets, new and diffuse demands were emerging, acquiring “a green and yellow hue, with moralizing discourses, sometimes averse and sometimes aggressive regarding traditional political institutions”, all added to an exaltation of patriotism “as a rule identified with conservative tendencies” (Damo, 2013, p. 17). The yellow and green of the Brazilian national team shirt predominated as the clothing most used by these types of protesters (Figure 4). In 2015, these same colours took over some streets of the country that were the scene of acts in favour of the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, which happened in 2016¹⁷. One of the most important national symbols, which is the yellow and green shirt of the national team, went through a process of appropriation by the right and, later, by the Brazilian extreme right that would lead to the election of Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018 (Guedes & Silva, 2019).

¹⁶ Many “June journeys” demonstrations took place during the 2013 Confederations Cup. On this matter, see: Guedes (2013).

¹⁷ It is important to remember that Dilma Rousseff had been booed with profanity by the majority of the public present at Maracanã, during the opening of the World Cup in 2014. It is worth noting that the World Cup led to a process of gentrification of stadiums in Brazil, a phenomenon analyzed by Gilmar Mascarenhas (2014).



Fig 4. Demonstrators in favor of the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff protest with shirts of the Brazilian national team (Source: Nacho Doce – Reuters)¹⁸.

Concomitant to its kidnapping by the extreme right, represented by the political-ideological radicalization of Bolsonarism, the shirt of the Brazilian national football team becomes the target of rejection by part of the population. In this sense, the process of “decline of the country in football boots” pointed out by Ronaldo Helal and Antonio Jorge Soares (2003) gains another chapter. It is a fact that the proclaimed “country in football boots” concerned football practiced by men, especially by the men’s national team in World Cups. The women’s team was not part of the football and nation equation that marks the history of this sport in Brazil, as mentioned. It took time for the women of the national team to have their own uniform. From 1988 to 2011, the uniforms worn by the female players followed the same model used for the men’s national team, with only a few adjustments. In 2015, Nike even designed a uniform just for them, the shirt 2, in blue¹⁹, which was used at the World Cup in Canada. However, the model was not marketed. In the 2016 Olympic Games, there was a strong movement on social media of fans who complained about the fact that they could not buy the uniform with the name of Marta, the most important female player in the history of Brazilian football. Meanwhile, shirts with the inscription Neymar were easily found²⁰.

The national team shirt is central in the dispute “Neymar x Marta”, central theme of sports journalism coverage analysed here. As shown here, an emblematic moment of this clash was represented by the image of a green and yellow shirt, of the men’s national team, with the name Neymar crossed out in pen, with Marta’s name handwritten by the fan Bernardo Sampaio Silva. We can say that this gesture was one of the legacies of the 2016 Olympic Games. In 2019, the elimination of the national team from the World Cup was reported on the front page of the newspaper *O Globo* with the headline “In defeat, Marta’s victorious message” (June 24, 2019). The image that accompanies this sentence is that of a woman photographed on her back, watching a television that broadcasted an interview given by the player Marta at the end of the Brazil vs. France game (Figure 5). Said woman was wearing a yellow and green shirt with the

¹⁸ Available from: https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/06/16/deportes/1529108134_704637.html

¹⁹ The main uniform of the Brazilian national team is the yellow and green shirt, the second uniform is the blue one.

²⁰ Source: <https://www.conmebol.com/pt-br/noticias-pt-br-2/todos-querem-ter-camiseta-10-de-marta-no-brasil/>

name Marta. In the same World Cup, *Folha de São Paulo* had previously resorted to similar tactics to report on the women's national team's win over Australia. The aforementioned newspaper published the image of two women at a bar table, photographed while looking at a screen where they watched the game in question. One of the women wore a yellow and green shirt of the national team stylised with Marta's name, Neymar's crossed out, and below the words "Not them" (Figure 6).



Fig 5. Cover of the newspaper *O Globo* published on June 24, 2019 (Source: Acervo Digital Jornal O Globo).



Fig 6. Main cover of *Folha de São Paulo*, edition of June 14, 2019.

Who are they that you say no to? Certainly, Neymar who, in addition to a troubled relationship with the Brazilian fans, at the time had been denounced by the model Najila Trindade, who

accused him of sexual assault²¹. No was being said to Jair Bolsonaro – target of several protests by women who raised the flag of Not Him²² – and his supporters, among whom, many football players. In addition, 'Not Them' can be a negative reference to the men's national team itself that at the time participated in the American Cup of football²³.

We can read the crossed-out name of Neymar and the inscription of Marta as a way of signalling the need to renew the meanings of the yellow and green shirt that, as we have seen, had been "kidnapped" by the extreme right with its frequent attack on women and other minorities. And in this process, women's football, or more specifically, the Brazilian women's national football team, plays a relevant role in rescuing the green and yellow colours that symbolise Brazil through football. The lack of equity between men and women is not exclusive to football, being noticeable in Brazilian society as a whole. Part of the war of the sexes "Neymar x Marta" to a large extent reflects a moment of a kind of "footballing feminism" – or even sporting – that has manifested itself, in Brazil, in the last 10 years, which means saying that football has been an important arena of debates, visibility, and promotion of actions linked to agendas related to gender equity and its intersectional aspects.

4. Conclusion

At the time of writing this article, we are on the verge of holding a new edition of the Olympic Games, at which time the women's and men's national teams participate in the same event of global reach. We saw how this concomitance enabled the discursive staging of a 'war of the sexes', a phenomenon that marked the coverage of Brazilian football in the 2016 Games. This phenomenon was present in the stands of the matches of the football teams in this competition. However, in recent years, several changes have taken place, many of which are related to the strengthening of women's football in Brazil. Marta ended her career in the national team, being praised by the sports press. Neymar continues his history in the national team in a somewhat troubled way, suffering from injuries that have marked his trajectory in important competitions²⁴. Neymar continued to collect controversies in his public life, becoming an almost inseparable mixture of sports idol and celebrity whose fame does not necessarily feed on his achievements on the football pitches (Andrews, 2015).

Moreover, it is necessary to mention the wear and tear that the Brazilian men's national team has gone through with the fans, no longer being univocally interpreted as one of the symbols of Brazilianness. This attrition is explained by factors such as the scandals in which CBF (Brazilian Football Confederation) leaders were involved linked to corruption and allegations of harassment of female employees. Added to these events is the association between the yellow and green shirt

²¹ In July 2019, the São Paulo police closed the case due to lack of proof of crime.

²² '#EleNão' (Not Him) was a demonstration in repudiation of then-presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro. The movement began on social media and spread to Brazilian cities in September 2018. The campaign was a women's rally.

²³ In 2019, Brazil hosted the American Cup of men's football. This is the main men's football competition between national teams in South America and is organised by the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL).

²⁴ In 2014, Neymar was injured in the quarterfinals with a back injury. In 2018, he was injured in February, and played in the World Cup without being fully physically healthy, as he returned to play only in May, a month before the tournament. In 2019, he missed the American Cup title with an ankle injury. In 2022, he was injured in the debut of the World Cup, returned in the eighth finals, scoring from a penalty against Korea.

of the Brazilian men's national team and Bolsonaroism, provoking rejection of one of the most important symbols of national identity. The women's national team, by contrast, is in a fruitful moment regarding the symbolic investments it has been gaining. The women's national team, in this sense, can carry with it the potential to enable a renewed relationship between Brazil and its national symbols, via football. There remains the challenge of not counting on Marta, the player who had a fundamental role in maintaining media interest in the women's national team, even without winning an important title. However, it is an opportunity to broaden and diversify the reach of the media spotlight and the audience in the direction of other players.

The media's manipulative tactics (mainly O Globo newspaper) are unfair and disrespectful to women athletes and women in general. They exploited female players, invoking Marta's name to "motivate" male athletes by provoking Neymar and his peers. This humiliation, primarily targeting men, ultimately becomes a violent affront to women – once again. Such comparisons are deeply irritating, entirely harmful to women, and completely unacceptable.

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Qatar 2022 e sportswashing: un'analisi critica del discorso mediatico italiano

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Abstract

Mega-sport events are often a means used by host countries to enhance their public image or draw attention away from human rights violations. From this point of view, this paper focuses on Qatar 2022, one of the most contested editions in the history of the FIFA World Cup. The authors look to understand how journalistic discourse shapes the processes of legitimisation or contestation of sportswashing practices. The contribution considers the media chronicle of Qatar 2022 in the main newspapers of the Italian sports press, through the methodological tools of Critical Discourse Analysis. The results show residual attention by sports journalism to the controversial aspects of this mega-event, taking into account the system of power relations both within and outside the sports journalism field.

Keywords: Sportswashing, Qatar World Cup 2022, Sport and mediatization, Critical discourse analysis, Counter-narratives of sport mega-events.

1. Introduzione¹

Nel gennaio 2022 Karim Zidan ha scritto un articolo per il *The Guardian* definendo il 2022 come «l'anno più importante per lo *sportswashing*». Il giornalista si riferiva ai grandi eventi sportivi internazionali – dai Giochi Olimpici invernali di Pechino ai Mondiali di calcio maschili in Qatar – visti come “tattica popolare” attraverso cui i regimi autoritari nascondono i loro tristi precedenti in materia di diritti umani e salvaguardia ambientale. Il termine *sportswashing* è apparso per la prima volta negli articoli di Gulnara Akhundova (2015) e Rebecca Vincent (2015) a proposito dei Giochi Europei di Baku, per poi diffondersi negli anni a seguire grazie alle denunce di Amnesty

¹ Sebbene il saggio sia frutto di una riflessione comune agli autori, la stesura dei paragrafi 3.1, 4 e 6 è di Antonietta De Feo. I paragrafi 2, 3 e 5 sono attribuiti a Stefano Masini. L'introduzione è stata redatta da entrambi gli autori.

International e Human Rights Watch (Chen & Doran, 2022). Si tratta di uno dei concetti più recenti ad essere entrati con forza nel lessico mediatico e popolare (Grix et al., 2023) relativo alla narrazione degli eventi sportivi internazionali. Questi ultimi, infatti, “sono avvenimenti intrinsecamente politici” (Sbetti, 2019), nella misura in cui partecipare a mega-eventi sportivi (e ancor più ospitarli) “è considerato uno dei modi caratteristici di utilizzare lo sport per aumentare la visibilità e la familiarità internazionale di uno Stato e per migliorare la propria immagine” (Kobierecki & Strožek, 2020, p. 50).

Al riguardo, il presente contributo si concentra sulla FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, tra le edizioni più contestate della storia della Coppa del mondo di calcio maschile, la prima che si è disputata in inverno, la prima in Medioriente e la prima che si è svolta in un’unica città, Doha. Dal 2010, anno in cui ottenne la nomina a Paese organizzatore, l’emirato è finito al centro dell’attenzione mediatica per le ripetute violazioni dei diritti umani, ma anche e soprattutto per gli oltre 6.500 lavoratori migranti che hanno perso la vita nei cantieri degli stadi (Ganji, 2016). Da un punto di vista prettamente sportivo, invece, Qatar 2022 ha saputo regalare grandi storie, dalla favola del Marocco al lieto fine di Messi e la vittoria dell’Argentina.

Di tale evento, focalizzeremo l’attenzione sulla sua narrazione da parte delle principali testate della stampa sportiva italiana. In particolare, attraverso un’analisi critica del discorso mediatico di Qatar 2022, l’indagine ha lo scopo di mettere in luce il contributo del giornalismo sportivo alla costruzione discorsiva dei mega-eventi sportivi e delle questioni socio-politiche ad essi collegati. Dopo aver passato in rassegna il dibattito scientifico sul rapporto tra *sportwashing* e mega-eventi sportivi, ci affideremo alla prospettiva bourdieusiana per la quale il campo giornalistico come quello sportivo sono microcosmi dominati da un proprio *nomos* e, allo stesso tempo, sono immersi in uno spazio sociale più ampio da cui agiscono pressioni commerciali e politiche. I giornalisti sportivi, come “professionisti della parola”, esplicitano una visione del mondo *in* e *attraverso* uno specifico mercato linguistico. Ma gli interessi espressivi del campo giornalistico sportivo sono allo stesso tempo costantemente negoziati e, talvolta, sottoposti all’esercizio di forme di censura attraverso il controllo politico o economico (Bourdieu, 1982, 2010). Ciò vale ancor più laddove le élite politiche dispongono e impiegano massicce risorse per influenzare l’agenda setting mediale e, in generale, per “far passare il loro messaggio” (Castells, 2009).

In questa prospettiva, dunque, le modalità operative della narrazione mediale di Qatar 2022 sono esaminate in relazione a una visione del campo giornalistico sportivo come relativamente autonomo e alle strutture di potere che sottendono ai processi comunicativi.

2. Sportwashing e mega-eventi sportivi

È difficile trovare una definizione univoca del fenomeno dello *sportwashing* (Boykoff, 2022). Con esso ci si riferisce all’insieme delle pratiche a cui ricorrono organizzazioni, governi e Stati che attraverso investimenti nel mondo dello sport, acquisizioni di club, sponsorizzazioni o organizzazione di mega-eventi, intendono migliorare la propria immagine pubblica e spostare l’attenzione da determinate attività controverse (Carlton, 2023).

Il ricorso a pratiche di strumentalizzazione dello sport, e in particolar modo dei mega-eventi di scala mondiale, sta diventando sempre più frequente (Scharpf et al., 2022; Sbetti, 2019; Martelli, 2012). Tuttavia, l'interesse accademico nei confronti dello *sportswashing* è rimasto in un certo senso limitato (Skey 2023).

Passando in rassegna saggi e articoli, è possibile notare come tale letteratura si dirami prevalentemente in tre direzioni: la prima è quella della questione terminologica, che riguarda la definizione di *sportswashing* e l'inquadratura generale del fenomeno; la seconda linea di analisi mette in relazione la diplomazia dello sport con il concetto di *soft power* (Nye, 2004); infine, una terza ed ultima direzione è quella che introduce alle pratiche di "pulizia" dell'immagine attraverso lo sport partendo da casi specifici, il più delle volte facendo riferimento all'organizzazione di grandi eventi sportivi, ma si segnalano anche studi su interventi mirati come le acquisizioni di società (Kearns et al. 2024). Difato (2021) parla di "infanzia accademica", dovuta probabilmente al fatto che *sportswashing* è a tutti gli effetti un neologismo.

Non si commetta però l'errore di credere che lo *sportswashing* sia un fenomeno tanto recente quanto il termine che lo contraddistingue. La manipolazione dell'opinione pubblica attraverso l'organizzazione di impeccabili spettacoli sportivi o il ben figurare nelle prove atletiche è un fatto antico. Studiosi come Mark Golden (1998) e Paul Christesen (2007) lo fanno risalire al tempo dell'antica Grecia, basandosi sul racconto di Alcibiade alle Olimpiadi del 416 a.C. contenuto in *Vite Parallele*. Già da allora i grandi eventi sportivi rappresentavano un contesto dove mettersi in mostra con spavalderia, sopravvalutandosi con coscienza, al fine di camuffare la realtà (Freeman, 2012). E come dimostra questa tesi, al contrario di quello che si tende a credere, lo *sportswashing* non è appannaggio dei soli Paesi non democratici:

Come tanti altri anglicismi, questo neologismo nel nostro paese ha avuto un immediato successo ed è stato adottato non soltanto dagli attivisti per i diritti umani, ma anche dai mass media e più in generale dai commentatori sportivi. Si tratta di un'espressione sicuramente affascinante ed efficace sul piano narrativo, che però rischia di banalizzare un fenomeno complesso come quello dell'uso politico dello sport in contesto internazionale. [...] non si tratta di un termine scientifico, bensì di un'espressione che viene usata con un chiaro intento politico, ovvero: biasimare le strumentalizzazioni dello sport da parte di un paese di cui non si apprezza la condotta morale. È funzionale a tracciare una linea di separazione fra l'uso politico dello sport che fanno i paesi democratici e quelli autoritari (Sbetti, 2022).

Vi sono, infatti, esempi di strumentalizzazione politica dello sport scampati all'etichettamento negativo tipicamente occidentale, come quello del Sudafrica di Nelson Mandela. Lo storico presidente ha saputo sfruttare al meglio il potenziale di grandi eventi come i campionati del mondo di rugby e cricket, rispettivamente nel 1995 e nel 2003, la Coppa delle nazioni africane del 1996 e soprattutto i Mondiali di calcio del 2010, favorendo i processi di riconciliazione delle due anime del Paese, proiettando all'esterno l'immagine di uno Stato moderno.

Premesso, dunque, che identificare lo *sportswashing* come fenomeno distante o addirittura sconosciuto alle democrazie è fuorviante, va segnalato lo stretto legame esistente tra regimi autoritari e diplomazia dello sport. Nel corso del XX secolo vi hanno attinto, tra gli altri, i grandi dittatori europei Hitler, Mussolini e Francisco Franco. In particolare, il primo, grazie all'organizzazione e alla condotta impeccabile tenuta dai tedeschi durante i Giochi di Berlino 1936, riuscì a far abbassare la guardia all'opinione pubblica internazionale. Il giornalista canadese

Lou Marsh arrivò persino a sostenere che quella del maltrattamento degli ebrei da parte dei nazisti era solo una storia gonfiata (Menkis & Troper, 2015). In tempi più recenti si sono comportati da *sportswasher* Cina (Finlay & Xin Xin, 2010), Russia (Brizzi & Sbeti, 2018) e il già citato Azerbaijan, ma i grandi protagonisti del settore nel terzo millennio sono i Paesi del Golfo (Tosi, 2020).

I regni mediorientali hanno trovato nello sport globalizzato e spettacolarizzato terreno fertile per le proprie ambizioni geopolitiche. Il loro non è un mero esercizio di *nation branding*: la posta in gioco è alta, va dalla crescita economica a quella culturale, e comprende l'avvicinamento all'Occidente (Boykoff, 2022). Più di altre industrie, è stata quella calcistica a cedere alle *avances* dei fondi sovrani. Nel 2008 gli Emirati Arabi Uniti hanno prelevato il Manchester City; nel 2011 il Paris Saint-Germain è passato nelle mani del Qatar Sports Investments; ultimo *takeover* di questo calibro, in ordine cronologico, è quello saudita del Newcastle United, datato 2021. Tutto questo in uno scenario costellato di contratti commerciali e sponsorizzazioni con aziende come Aramco, Emirates, Qatar Airways ed Etihad. Inoltre, diverse federazioni, comprese FIGC e RFEF, hanno siglato accordi per far disputare competizioni nazionali in terra araba, arricchendo ulteriormente un programma che da diversi anni dispone di eventi di Formula 1, Moto GP, tennis, golf e altre discipline. L'immissione di capitale e idee nel panorama sportivo internazionale sta portando frutti non trascurabili ai Paesi del Golfo che, come dimostra il *Global Soft Power Index* (Figura 1), vedono aumentare la propria influenza su scala globale.

Paese	Posizionamento				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Emirati Arabi Uniti	18	17	15	10	10
Arabia Saudita	26	24	24	19	18
Qatar	31	26	26	24	21
Kuwait	-	42	36	35	37
Oman	-	-	49	46	49
Bahrein	-	-	-	50	-

Fonte: Brand Finance (2020-2024)

Fig 1. L'ascesa dei Paesi del Golfo nella top 50 delle nazioni per soft power

In quello che Mandel (1975) ha definito “tardo capitalismo”, “gli Stati ricchi di capitale e poveri di prestigio culturale cercano di investire e [...] gli Stati con un alto prestigio culturale sono felici di barattare le loro risorse con il capitale” (Grix et al., 2023, p. 2). Le democrazie stanno perdendo interesse verso la corsa a mega-eventi che andrebbero allestiti con i soldi dei contribuenti (Søyland & Moriconi, 2022); i Paesi non democratici sono invece attratti dal loro carattere apparentemente apolitico (Jiménez-Martínez & Skey, 2018). È così che il Qatar, come i suoi vicini del Golfo, ne è diventato un organizzatore seriale (Black, 2014). La famiglia Al Thani, però, al contrario di ogni altro emirato mediorientale, è riuscita in qualcosa senza precedenti nella regione: accaparrarsi i Mondiali di calcio FIFA, massimo torneo calcistico internazionale e competizione più importante dello sport contemporaneo insieme alle Olimpiadi. In un *mediascape* frammentato come quello attuale, gli appuntamenti appena citati sono gli unici di questo genere ancora in grado di garantire

audience di notevoli dimensioni (Skey, 2021) e, con esse, la possibilità di influenzare l'opinione pubblica, specialmente quella estera.

Il microstato del Qatar ha tradizionalmente attribuito enorme rilevanza allo sport, in generale, e al calcio, in particolare, visti come strumenti altamente strategici (Rolim Silva, 2014). Qatar 2022 è stato il coronamento di un progetto di lungo corso, nonché il momento in cui il fenomeno dello *sportswashing* ha toccato il suo massimo storico.

3. Il triangolo sport-media-politica

Lo sport come campo sociale è costituito da una struttura complessa di relazioni tra differenti agenti quali federazioni, organizzazioni, club, atleti professionisti, dilettanti, tifosi e tutte quelle figure che entrano in contatto in maniera diretta con la pratica sportiva; ognuno di loro occupa una posizione che gli garantisce maggiore o minore autorità. In una chiave bourdieusiana, se ne riconosce inoltre la relativa autonomia rispetto ad altri campi, *in primis* quello economico. In quest'ottica diventa scientificamente impossibile parlare di sport in senso lato (D'Amato, 2009). Particolarmente stretti, poi, sono i rapporti che il campo sportivo intrattiene con due campi: politico e mediatico. Insieme, campo sportivo, campo politico e campo mediatico danno vita al triangolo sport-media-politica², un complesso di relazioni che mette in luce le molteplici manifestazioni dello sport contemporaneo, incluso il fenomeno della strumentalizzazione politica dello sport.

² Il triangolo sport-media-politica si ispira allo *sport-media-sponsor triangle* (Martelli, 2014). Volendo mettere in risalto i link tra sport, media e politica, che poi si riflettono sul fenomeno dello *sportswashing*, il terzo fattore è stato sostituito dal campo politico. Con ciò non si vuole sottovalutare l'importanza e la pervasività del campo economico, le cui logiche attraversano tutte e tre le sfere sociali fino a deformarle (Bifulco & Catone, 2022, p. 149).

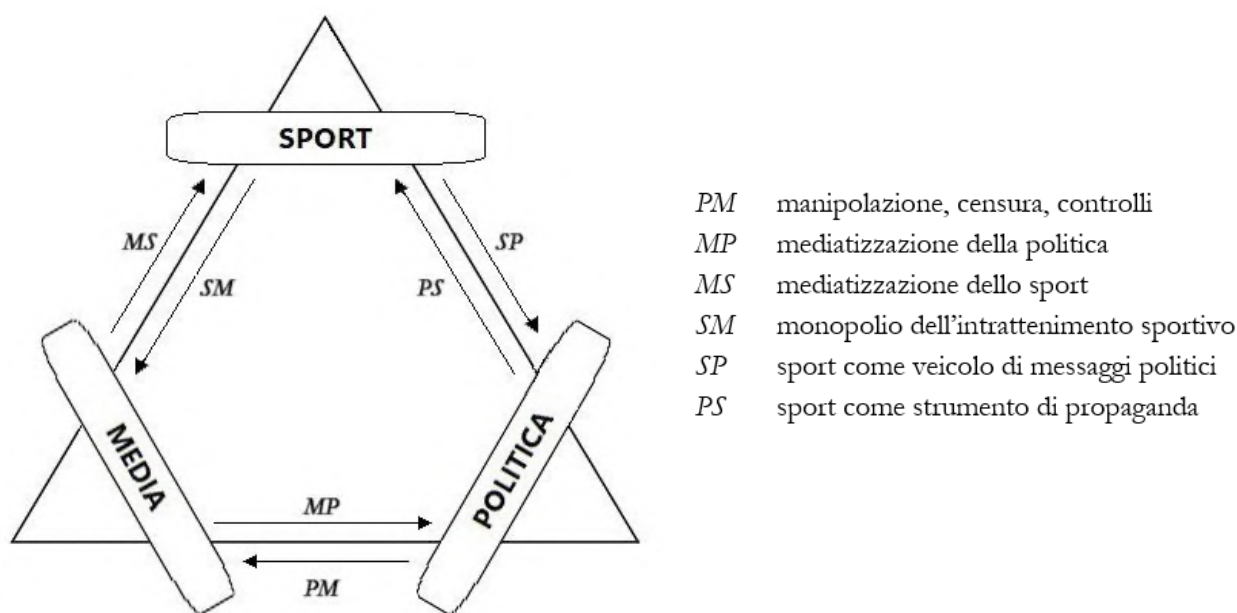


Fig 2. Il triangolo sport-media-politica

Ogni vertice del triangolo sport-media-politica intrattiene rapporti di forza con gli altri due (sinteticamente riportati nella legenda della Figura 2), tanto in un verso quanto nell'altro. I media, per esempio, esercitano un'opera di mediatizzazione nei confronti degli altri due termini della triade; contemporaneamente, però, subiscono controlli e censure da parte del potere politico – in maniera più o meno velata a seconda della nazione e in base alla tipologia di Stato – e sono tenuti sotto scacco dall'intrattenimento sportivo e dal suo enorme peso in sede di organizzazione dei palinsesti e creazione dell'agenda. La politica, invece, guarda allo sport per fini propagandistici; al tempo stesso, i protagonisti dello sport, “agenti visibili” del campo (Bourdieu, 2010), possono evadere questi confini e veicolare nuovi messaggi nell'arena politica, oppure contribuire apertamente alla pulizia di immagine degli Stati. È all'interno di questo triangolo che si articolano fenomeni come lo *sportswashing*, che non possono essere spiegati tenendo conto delle sole logiche del campo sportivo dal momento che, appunto, affondano le proprie radici in tutti i campi del triangolo: non sono fatti sportivi più di quanto siano fatti politici o mediatici.

I megaeventi sportivi sono stati spesso oggetto di studio per le ricadute che possono generare a livello economico (Tavani, 2023), sociale (Elahi et al., 2021) e turistico (Nicolau, 2012). In virtù di quanto detto finora, però, non possiamo trascurarne l'impatto geopolitico, specialmente per i Paesi ospitanti. Dietro ogni grande evento, continentale o internazionale, sia esso riconducibile a strategie di *sportswashing* o meno, si cela l'intreccio tra sport, politica mediatizzata e media politicizzati. Potremmo classificare le Olimpiadi, i Mondiali di calcio e competizioni simili per importanza come “momenti critici del discorso”³, frangenti in cui cade il mito decoubertiano di uno sport vergine, estraneo alla politica, e si manifesta lo stretto legame che in fin dei conti è

³ Con questo termine si fa riferimento ad eventi specifici che possono trasformare un tema marginale o poco evidente in un problema pubblico significativo (Cfr. Carvalho, 2008, p. 166).

sempre esistito tra i due microcosmi. Per attivare la lavanderia dell'immagine non basta però la strumentalizzazione politica del fenomeno sportivo, è necessaria la complicità (Fruh et al., 2023) dei mezzi di comunicazione, attraverso i quali gli agenti e le istituzioni coinvolte nella competizione sportiva concorrono alla costruzione del senso e del valore dell'evento stesso (Bourdieu, 1997).

3.1 Il campo mediatico sportivo

I media, e il campo giornalistico in particolare, rappresentano quindi una variabile chiave sia per gli *sportswasher* sia per chi studia i loro comportamenti. Per effetto diretto o indiretto della logica commerciale, i media incoraggiano la trasformazione degli eventi sportivi globali in spettacoli, in forme di intrattenimento concepite per assecondare il pubblico più ampio possibile (Bourdieu, 1997; Spalletta, Ugolini 2013).

Il campo mediatico non è tuttavia omogeneo, e la stessa informazione giornalistica è attraversata da tensioni – come ad esempio l'opposizione tra coloro avversi al conservatorismo e alla censura e coloro che si sottomettono alle necessità della domanda esterna. Se guardiamo al giornalismo sportivo italiano, non pochi studi ne hanno evidenziato le peculiarità sia sul piano linguistico – grazie a un lessico ricco di neoformazioni (Murrmann, Surmaj 2015) e di sperimentazioni di stili espressivi vicini al *literary journalism* americano (Spalletta, Ugolini, 2013) – che, come afferma Tirino (2019, p. 172) sul piano dell'autorità culturale legata in special modo alla “frequenziazione assidua dell'ambiente sportivo” da parte dei giornalisti, che ha assicurato loro la costruzione di relazioni affidabili e privilegiate con atleti e allenatori e “l'accesso a informazioni inedite”. Il suo linguaggio narrativo, caratterizzato dall'uso di figure retoriche ed elativi “per intensificare le emozioni dei lettori” e “creare immagini di forte carica espressiva” – come ad esempio quelle legate all'atleta-eroe (Murrmann, Surmaj, 2015, pp. 201-202) – ha anticipato quei processi di spettacolarizzazione e personalizzazione che contraddistinguono il *mediascape* attuale. Rispetto alle altre due componenti del triangolo, recenti ricerche, sia nel campo della comunicazione politica che della sociologia dello sport, hanno messo in luce due aspetti interessanti. In primo luogo, si assiste all'evoluzione del giornalismo sportivo come campo privilegiato di un processo di “popolarizzazione” della politica, a partire dal ventennio berlusconiano (Novelli, 2006) durante il quale Silvio Berlusconi ha incarnato nella stampa sportiva “il politico in grado di veicolare attraverso lo sport un messaggio vincente e il grande uomo di sport in grado di affrontare questioni politiche” (Spalletta, Ugolini, 2015, p. 83). Ciò ha senza dubbio contribuito a un processo di “contaminazione” della notizia sportiva (Spalletta, 2015), la quale ingloba argomenti connessi allo sport ma di genere differente.

In secondo luogo, gli attori ai vertici del campo sportivo, come le federazioni e i club, si avvalgono sempre più di *media manager* al proprio interno, il cui obiettivo è gestire e filtrare la comunicazione dei tesserati verso la stampa sportiva (Tirino, 2019; Hutchins, Rowe, 2012). Durante i mega-eventi come il Mondiale di calcio, la comunicazione raggiunge il suo apice come valore economico essenziale per i club e le federazioni, soprattutto in ragione del ruolo pervasivo degli sponsor (Tirino, 2019). In rapporto a questo nuovo ambiente mediale, tali eventi rappresentano

quindi un momento in cui possono rafforzarsi i meccanismi di controllo sui contenuti veicolati dal giornalismo sportivo.

4. L'analisi critica del discorso sportivo

L'analisi del ruolo del giornalismo sportivo nella costruzione discorsiva di Qatar 2022 – con particolare riferimento al fenomeno dello *sportwashing* – presuppone una concezione del discorso mediale come “socialmente condizionato e socialmente costitutivo” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258), nel senso che esso acquisisce significato nello spazio sociale in cui è immerso e, allo stesso tempo, può contribuire a riprodurre o trasformare tale spazio e le sue relazioni di potere (De Feo & Luchetti, 2023). Come evidenzia Judith Butler (2010), lo scopo di certe produzioni linguistiche non è solo quello di descrivere ma di *costituire* una realtà sociale e il senso di ciò che è nello spazio e nel tempo citando una convenzione esistente. Nel nostro caso, abbiamo dunque esaminato i testi mediali prodotti sul mega-evento per capire se e in quale misura le strategie politiche dello *sportwashing*, che hanno accompagnato la rappresentazione di Qatar 2022, vengano riprodotte o contestate nel linguaggio mediatico sportivo. Ciò dipenderà non solo dalle logiche interne al campo giornalistico (Bourdieu, 2010; Accardo, 2017; Bifulco, 2015), ma anche dal grado di influenza che i soggetti interpellati nei testi mediali (calciatori, tifosi, membri degli organi istituzionali della FIFA, ecc.) hanno nel plasmare i significati dell'evento stesso.

Dal punto di vista metodologico, abbiamo analizzato il racconto mediatico di Qatar 2022 sui principali canali della stampa sportiva italiana: *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport* e *Tuttosport*. L'analisi degli articoli raccolti è stata orientata dall'approccio della Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Da questo punto di vista, il discorso mediale è un'arena particolarmente importante per l'azione sociale e politica e, al contempo, performa alcune questioni in modo sovratestuale (Carvalho, 2008). Tra i metodi di indagine che vanno sotto l'espressione di CDA, ci siamo affidati al framework metodologico proposto da Anabela Carvalho (2008)⁴.

Nel nostro caso specifico, i dati provengono da tutti gli articoli elettronici disponibili sui siti web delle suddette testate giornalistiche pubblicati prima, durante e immediatamente dopo i Mondiali di calcio maschile del 2022 (dal 1° luglio al 31 dicembre 2022), tenendo conto della sequenza temporale dei testi e delle sue implicazioni dal punto di vista della conoscenza pubblica dello *sportwashing*. All'interno dei motori di ricerca di ciascuna testata, abbiamo inserito come parole chiave “Qatar 2022” e “Mondiali di calcio 2022”, selezionando per *La Gazzetta dello Sport* 593 articoli, per il *Corriere dello Sport* 947 articoli e per *Tuttosport* 702 articoli⁵. Per ciascuna testata, gli

⁴ Gli studiosi di CDA condividono una particolare preoccupazione per la relazione tra testi, processi sociali e rapporti di potere. Il tipo di lavoro interpretativo offerto dalla CDA pone attenzione al testo come luogo di lotta, in quanto i codici linguistici agiti dagli attori tradiscono punti di vista e prese di posizione differenti che si contendono il dominio dello spazio del dibattito pubblico.

⁵ Le indicazioni relative alla fonte sono state riportate nell'analisi dei risultati secondo una designazione coincisa della testata (GdS per *La Gazzetta dello Sport*; CdS per il *Corriere dello Sport* e TS per *Tuttosport*), collocata in nota insieme alla data di pubblicazione dell'articolo.

articoli sono stati dapprima suddivisi in due macrocategorie: ‘campo’ ed ‘extracampo’. Nella prima abbiamo raccolto gli articoli relativi alla cronaca sportiva di ciò che è accaduto sul campo da gioco durante una partita, con particolare riferimento ai resoconti dei match e alla valutazione delle prestazioni degli atleti da un punto di vista tecnico.

Nella seconda il suffisso di “extra” non va inteso come qualcosa che si pone al di fuori delle dinamiche del campo. Ciò che ivi accade può dare luogo a nuove narrazioni che drammatizzano, specie in termini di intrattenimento, le azioni degli attori *in campo* (calciatori, tifosi, allenatori, arbitri, ecc.) e le loro interazioni con una panoplia di soggetti, istituzionali e non, che intervengono indirettamente sulle “regole del gioco”. Tra un match e l’altro, inoltre, la stragrande maggioranza degli articoli raccolti riguardano questioni che possono sembrare ancillari rispetto alle performance sul campo, ma che in realtà sono funzionali all’ ‘engagement’ dell’audience (Tirino, 2019, p. 162). Non parliamo soltanto di commenti tecnici specialistici sulle scelte tattiche, di pagelle e dichiarazioni post-partita o in conferenza stampa, ma anche di contenuti che stimolano una dinamica di lettura guidata dalle emozioni (es: le vicende biografiche e familiari degli atleti, i pettegolezzi sulle celebrità come Messi e Ronaldo; i pronostici, che influenzano l’aspettativa di suspense; le notizie su possibili trasferimenti e sul valore di mercato di atleti amati o controversi; ecc.). Trattandosi di un mega-evento realizzato in uno degli Stati più ricchi al mondo, anche l’infrastruttura avveniristica e gli investimenti nella logistica sono stati oggetto dell’attenzione mediatica.

Possiamo ragionevolmente ipotizzare che alimentare mediaticamente la connessione emotiva tra i lettori e i partecipanti di Qatar 2022 comporti una ‘normalizzazione’ dell’eccezionalità che connota ogni mega-evento. Tuttavia, all’interno di questa macrocategoria abbiamo rilevato un gruppo di articoli che hanno messo a tema le controversie di ordine sociale e politico dei Mondiali, o quanto meno riportato le voci di indignazione che circolavano già da tempo su scala globale⁶. Abbiamo voluto quindi verificare quali denunce e narrazioni oppositive si attualizzano nei testi mediali ed entro quali frame interpretativi. Per questo gruppo di articoli (denominato ‘controframe’) sono state quindi prese in considerazione le seguenti dimensioni testuali (Carvalho, 2008):

- il layout, cioè la sezione nella quale è stato pubblicato l’articolo, la sua dimensione e la presenza di elementi visivi (grafiche e fotografie);
- l’organizzazione strutturale, che pone attenzione sul titolo, sull’inizio e sui primi paragrafi dell’articolo;
- l’oggetto del discorso e gli eventi/problemi specifici ad esso associati;
- gli attori menzionati, nel duplice senso di soggetti che parlano e (s)oggetti di cui si parla.

In tal caso, si tratta di valutare il potere di inquadratura (*framing power*)⁷ dell’attore indicato;

⁶ Per *Tuttosport* abbiamo un totale di 59 articoli, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* 54 e su *Corriere dello Sport* 98.

⁷ Con l’espressione “potere di inquadratura” si intende «la capacità di un attore di trasmettere le proprie opinioni e posizioni attraverso i media, facendoli rappresentare dai giornalisti sotto forma di citazioni o testo normale. [...] tale potere di inquadratura è ceduto o negato in modo cruciale dai giornalisti, che detengono un grande potere di costruzione discorsiva di questioni sociali» (Carvalho, 2018 p. 168).

- il linguaggio, la grammatica e la retorica, che concernono l'identificazione dei concetti chiave e l'analisi della loro relazione con quadri culturali e ideologici più ampi.

5. Il racconto di Qatar 2022: tra critiche e contraddizioni

Secondo John Horne (2017), esistono due modi per contestare i megaeventi sportivi: attraverso la satira oppure facendo ricorso alle evidenze. Nel caso di Qatar 2022 sono state percorse entrambe le strade. Al cospetto del Mondiale più controverso di sempre, non potevano mancare invettive contro gli organizzatori del torneo. Tuttavia, gli articoli che accolgono le narrazioni di protesta sono una minoranza nella produzione giornalistica sportiva, dal 7% del *Corriere* al 9% della *Gazzetta*. In questo paragrafo analizzeremo dunque il trattamento riservato al Mondiale qatariota seguendo la già citata griglia di Anabela Carvalho. In linea generale, le critiche rilevate contro Qatar 2022 hanno precise tempistiche, molto simili tra le tre testate. I contenuti avversi all'organizzazione del Mondiale sono aumentati con l'avvicinamento alla cerimonia d'apertura e hanno raggiunto il culmine del rumore mediatico durante la fase a gironi, salvo poi ridimensionarsi nella fase ad eliminazione diretta. Gli ultimi passi del cammino verso la finale del Lusail Stadium hanno contribuito a sbilanciare ulteriormente il rapporto con i contenuti spettacolari. Il caso *bisht*, la sopravveste celebrativa indossata da Messi poco prima di alzare il trofeo, ha rianimato solo una breve parentesi polemica contro la strumentalizzazione politica del calcio. Lo scandalo Qatargate, emerso il 9 dicembre 2022, è passato tutto sommato in sordina sui siti di *Corriere* e *Tuttosport* che hanno liquidato la questione riportando i comunicati dell'ANSA. *Gazzetta*, invece, ne ha dato una copertura leggermente più accurata, pur inserendo questi articoli nella sezione "attualità" e non in quella "calcio" o "Mondiali 2022".

5.1 Sportwashing come oggetto del discorso

Il ricorso al termine *sportwashing* quale principale oggetto del discorso ha luogo alla vigilia della prima partita del torneo, in un momento cioè in cui tale nozione era sulla bocca di tutti. I quotidiani sportivi italiani ne hanno fatto cenno probabilmente per effetto dell'interlettura (Bourdieu, 1997), che spinge a cavalcare un tema di tendenza. Nel *Corriere* ne parla Roberto Maida⁸ e per *Tuttosport* Matteo Marani⁹. In entrambi i casi si tratta di inchieste rivolte solo agli abbonati mentre sulla *Gazzetta*, l'articolo di Luca Bianchin¹⁰ è accessibile a tutti i lettori. Similmente, le tre testate presentano nel giorno di avvio della Coppa del Mondo una rassegna delle principali polemiche e rivendicazioni contro lo stato del Qatar, dai diritti civili allo sfruttamento dei lavoratori. Nelle narrazioni delle due testate del Gruppo Amodei, il termine *sportwashing* è citato una sola volta nel testo. In particolare, sul *Corriere* "il solito meccanismo dello

⁸ *Mondiali in Qatar, il reportage: Doba nel pallone*, CdS, 19/11/2022.

⁹ *Qatar 2022: l'Occidente fa il Pilato forse per scelta, certo per necessità*, TS, 20/11/2022

¹⁰ *Ombre sul Golfo: tanti miliardi per il Mondiale, ma quanti calci ai diritti*, GdS, 20/11/2022

sportwashing” è contrapposto a una sorta di capacità intrinseca del gioco calcistico di poter “ripulire le coscienze”¹¹. Su *Tuttosport*, lo *sportwashing* è accostato a metafore come il “sipario di cartapesta” – che induce Infantino a limitare le dichiarazioni – o “il velo dell’ipocrisia”, che solo “i gol dei protagonisti del Mondiale possono squarciare”. Insomma, è nel gioco in sé che si possono trovare elementi di resistenza alle pressioni della speculazione economica e politica dello *sportwashing*. Questa visione ingenuamente essenzialista del gioco calcio è meno marcata sull’articolo della *Gazzetta*, dove il termine appare anche nel sottotitolo. In tal caso, si mettono a tema non solo le denunce, ma anche le trasformazioni che il governo qatariota sta lentamente approntando in tema di diritti umani. L’idea secondo cui l’internazionalizzazione spinta dal Mondiale sarebbe per l’emirato una occasione di confronto con i principi democratici dell’Occidente ha rappresentato per la FIFA un potente dispositivo di legittimazione della scelta di affidare l’organizzazione del mega-evento al Qatar. Rispetto ai due poli del discorso, non c’è però una presa di posizione netta da parte del giornalista, per il quale il dibattito resta aperto: “il Mondiale ha aiutato le riforme o questo è solo *sportwashing*, sfruttamento dello sport per ripulire l’immagine del Paese?”.

Dopo il fischio di inizio, si parla di *sportwashing* a metà campionato solo sul *Corriere* in occasione di un’intervista a Massimiliano Montanari¹², Chief Executive Officer del Centro Internazionale sulla Sicurezza dello Sport (ICSS), un istituto creato dal Qatar (fatto che non viene menzionato) come strumento di *soft power* per consolidare i legami con le organizzazioni internazionali (Dupraz-Dobias, 2022). Qui il termine è menzionato dall’intervistato a cui si cede il potere di inquadrarlo come dispositivo ideologico dei “detrattori del Mondiale”. D’altronde, già il titolo di questo articolo “I Mondiali più tecnologici di sempre e lo sport come promozione” lascia presagire un’attenzione maggiore alla straordinarietà degli investimenti da parte del Qatar sia nell’innovazione tecnologica che in politiche pubbliche “capaci di cambiare il volto del paese”. A differenza dell’articolo del 19 novembre, qui lo *sportwashing* appare un inutile e sgradevole neologismo, che andrebbe a intaccare l’impalcatura mitologica dello sport “come strumento di sviluppo e costruzione della pace”.

Infine, se ne riparla in relazione al *bisht* indossato da Messi. Al riguardo, sul *Corriere*¹³ si fa riferimento alle polemiche “scoppiate” sui social dove l’evento di premiazione circola come ennesima espressione di *sportwashing*.

La rosea commenta in maniera ambigua lasciando più di qualche dubbio sulla sua posizione:

è l’ennesimo tentativo degli emiri di “qatarizzare” il calcio? O voleva al contrario simboleggiare che il pallone appartiene a tutti gli angoli del globo, al punto da poter celebrare un campione del mondo argentino con un vestito tradizionalmente arabo?¹⁴

Sia sul *Corriere* che su *Gazzetta*, gli articoli sono accompagnati da fotografie focalizzate sul momento di euforia e trionfo della premiazione: Messi che alza la Coppa del mondo circondato

¹¹ *Mondiali in Qatar, il reportage: Doba nel pallone*, CdS, 19/11/2022.

¹² *I Mondiali più tecnologici di sempre e lo sport come promozione*, CdS, 07/12/2022.

¹³ *Il mantello di Messi dopo la finale diventa un caso: c’è un problema, ecco cosa dicono le regole Fifa*, CdS, 19/12/2022

¹⁴ *Che cos’è la “mantellina” indossata da Messi durante la premiazione*, GdS, 18/12/2022.

dai suoi compagni in festa. Più duro nei toni è Marani su *Tuttosport*, che si avventura in un suggestivo parallelismo tra il *bisht* e la Coppa del Duce dei Mondiali del 1934¹⁵. Coerentemente alle parole critiche nei confronti della premiazione, l'immagine scelta, a differenza delle altre due testate, è quella di Messi in *bisht* con Infantino e l'emiro Al Thani, protagonisti del Mondiale in tema di *sportwashing*.

5.2 Gli attori del discorso: Gianni Infantino, l'emiro e gli atleti

Guardando agli attori del discorso, tra i più menzionati nel *corpus* preso in esame ci sono senz'altro i massimi esponenti della FIFA e del Paese ospitante. In cima alla lista c'è Gianni Infantino, bersaglio preferito di strategie retoriche, che mettono in luce la sua complicità con gli interessi politici del Paese ospitante. A lui sono state dedicate rubriche *ad hoc* (sia all'inizio che alla fine del Mondiale) e, da un punto di vista dell'organizzazione strutturale degli articoli, l'intento critico si palesa già dai titoli ("Infantino difende l'indifendibile"¹⁶) e dagli attacchi ("È ufficiale: Gianni Infantino è campione del mondo. D'improntitudine"¹⁷). In un articolo del *Corriere* viene definito "sultano della FIFA"¹⁸, una espressione che associando Infantino a un titolo politico riferibile a contesti non democratici ne evidenzia sia la connivenza con essi che l'accentramento di potere all'interno della federazione internazionale (Bifulco, 2015).

Per quanto riguarda l'emiro del Qatar, Al Thani, il discorso è più controverso. Sui tre siti vengono riconosciute e segnalate le sue reali intenzioni: i lettori vengono messi in guardia da un governo che spera di trasformare Qatar 2022 in "un fenomenale veicolo di penetrazione commerciale e culturale"¹⁹, che "calpesta i diritti come uno zerbino"²⁰.

Gazzetta, *Corriere* e *Tuttosport* danno l'impressione di essere ben consapevoli delle storture di un evento che assomiglia ad un "arma di distrazione di massa"²¹. Parallelamente alla linea critica, i media hanno tuttavia portato avanti una narrazione di supporto al Qatar. Si riportano senza contraddittorio le dichiarazioni di ONU e ILO sui progressi fatti sul fronte dei diritti^{22 23}. Su *Gazzetta* Sebastiano Vernazza quasi decolpevolizza il Paese ospitante spostando l'attenzione su chi fa peggio: "Qatar nel mirino? Ok. Ma indigniamoci anche per l'Arabia Saudita..."²⁴. Si fa il

¹⁵ *Quel Bisht del Qatar sembra tanto la Coppa inventata da Mussolini*, TS, 24/12/2022.

¹⁶ *Infantino difende l'indifendibile: le pagelle alla conferenza*, TS, 19/11/2022.

¹⁷ *Infantino, fuori dal campo è stato il peggior mondiale della nostra vita*, CdS, 18/12/2022.

¹⁸ *Mondiali e Infantino, l'arma di distrazione di massa*, CdS, 20/11/2022.

¹⁹ *Mondiali in Qatar, il reportage: Doha nel pallone*, CdS, 19/11/2022.

²⁰ *Strette di mano, fotografie e baci: 10 cose che non si possono fare in Qatar*, GdS, 18/11/2022.

²¹ *Mondiali e Infantino, l'arma di distrazione di massa*, CdS, 20/11/2022.

²² *Qatar, l'Onu promuove le riforme del lavoro*, TS, 01/11/2022.

²³ *Mondiali, Stramaccioni: "Diritti? Qatar adeguato a tante norme"*, TS, 07/11/2022.

²⁴ *Qatar nel mirino? Ok. Ma indigniamoci anche per l'Arabia Saudita...*, GdS, 24/11/2022.

gioco di Al Thani pubblicizzando gli altri eventi ospitati dal suo Stato^{25 26}, sottolineando il grande impegno nel settore del turismo sportivo²⁷ e, dal punto di vista del layout, pubblicando immagini delle infrastrutture più all'avanguardia della capitale. E ancora, si chiude un occhio sul tema ambientale, arrivando addirittura a parlare di sostenibilità²⁸. La chiosa finale del direttore del *Corriere* Ivan Zazzaroni è spia di una duplice narrazione:

Come molti peccati, anche Qatar 2022 ha ottenuto il perdono. Proprio all'ultimo, grazie alla più bella finale di questo secolo, atto conclusivo del più contestato, odioso eppure calcisticamente significativo Mondiale del Millennio.²⁹

Altro discorso riguarda il potere d'inquadratura dei protagonisti sul campo di gioco, ovvero la capacità di calciatori e allenatori di veicolare attraverso i media il loro punto di vista su determinate questioni. Sebbene si scriva che “non è mai esistito un Mondiale così politico”³⁰, il *framing power* dei tesserati è veramente limitato. Diverse nazionali si sono schierate a favore della comunità LGBT, aderendo all'iniziativa della fascia One Love poi vietata dalla FIFA; ma quanto sono stati presi sul serio dai media? I pochi attori che hanno meritato attenzione sui siti dei tre quotidiani – Simon Kjaer³¹, Kasper Hjulmand³², Hansi Flick³³ – sono tesserati di nazionali che hanno optato per forme di protesta sopra le righe, insilenziabili dai media: Danimarca e Germania. La prima ha lasciato le famiglie dei calciatori a casa per non alimentare l'economia qatariota, si è presentata con delle divise speciali realizzate da Hummel in ricordo dei lavoratori migranti che hanno perso la vita nei cantieri degli stadi e ha comunicato la propria decisione di non sostenere Infantino alle successive elezioni minacciando di uscire dalla federazione internazionale. La seconda ha denunciato la censura e le limitazioni alla libertà di espressione operate dalla FIFA e dal Qatar posando con la mano davanti alla bocca nella foto di rito al debutto contro il Giappone. Queste due prese di posizione sono state accolte con entusiasmo in un primo momento, per poi subire un ridimensionamento: Roberto Colombo ha definito “ipocrita” lo sponsor tecnico dei danesi per via dei suoi stabilimenti in Cina, Bangladesh e Pakistan, “Paesi che non tutelano affatto i diritti dei lavoratori”³⁴; mentre il nobile gesto dei tedeschi, secondo ricostruzioni che trovano spazio sul *Corriere*, avrebbe fatto nascere frizioni interne allo spogliatoio e sarebbe quindi stato causa più o meno diretta dell'eliminazione della squadra al primo turno³⁵. In generale, anche al di

²⁵ *Qatar, non solo calcio: ecco le gare più famose in Medio Oriente, da F1 a MotoGP*, GdS, 22/11/2022.

²⁶ *Il Qatar: non solo calcio ma anche running e tennis*, GdS, 01/12/2022.

²⁷ *Altro che vice Dubai, ecco come Doha dopo il Mondiale vuole prendersi il turismo sportivo*, GdS, 02/11/2022.

²⁸ *Stadio Al Bayt: la tenda tecnologica e sostenibile del deserto*, TS, 25/11/2022.

²⁹ *L'Argentina di Messi campione, il più favoloso atto di giustizia*, CdS, 19/12/2022.

³⁰ *I giocatori non si fanno più imbavagliare: che bella conquista*, TS, 27/11/2022.

³¹ *Fascia One Love, Kjaer tuona contro la Fifa*, CdS, 22/11/2022.

³² *Danimarca-Tunisia, Hjulmand sulla fascia arcobaleno: “Messaggio chiaro”*, TS, 21/11/2022.

³³ *Germania, Flick e Kimmich: “Ci hanno impedito di difendere i diritti umani”*, TS, 22/11/2022.

³⁴ *Una maglia nel ricordo di Crujff e dei migranti morti*, TS, 06/10/2022.

³⁵ *Caos Germania, il gesto di alcuni giocatori ha rotto lo spogliatoio durante i mondiali*, CdS, 06/12/2022.

fuori della cerchia dei tesserati, la stampa non si è mostrata particolarmente propensa a dare spazio a voci interne pronte a battersi contro la strumentalizzazione politica del torneo.

6. Conclusioni

I mega-eventi sportivi e, in particolar modo, i Mondiali di calcio maschile rappresentano un “serbatoio” di contaminazioni della notizia sportiva. Come afferma Ugolini (2015, p. 204), “l’eccezionalità dell’evento [...] così come il suo notevolissimo seguito di pubblico e il suo carattere «festivo» fanno sì che si moltiplichino, al fianco degli eventi di stampo strettamente agonistico [...], numerosi avvenimenti riferibili ad altri generi giornalistici (politica, economia, cronaca, informazione medico-scientifica, giornalismo sociale, gossip, ecc.). Qatar 2022 non fa eccezione ed anzi le numerose voci critiche sollevate sotto la parola *sportwashing* hanno rappresentato per il giornalismo sportivo un elemento di notiziabilità. Pubblicando articoli di natura politica, la stampa di settore ha dimostrato di non ignorare le controversie che hanno accompagnato l’evento sin dal momento dell’assegnazione. Tali contenuti sono tuttavia in numero esiguo e in gran parte relegati alle sezioni a pagamento. Le prese di posizione dei giornalisti delle tre testate appaiono ambigue sul tema dello *sportwashing*, a volte essi si collocano facilmente come *skeptics* del Mondiale, ma più spesso come *boosters* dello stesso (Horne, 2017). Il racconto epico e spettacolarizzato di Qatar 2022, forte di una finale oltre ogni aspettativa, della storyline legata all’ultimo Mondiale di Cristiano Ronaldo e della favola Marocco, ha avuto certamente la meglio. È in questa costruzione mediatica del Mondiale come spettacolo (Bourdieu, 1997) che si ravvisa una relazione – più o meno tacita – di complicità del giornalismo sportivo con gli interessi delle altre due componenti del triangolo: quella politica nella veste dei regimi autoritari quali principali *sportwasher*, e quella sportiva, con particolar riguardo ai vertici della FIFA, che ottiene dalla mediatizzazione dello sport ingenti risorse, in termini sia economici che simbolici (Bourdieu, 1997; Bifulco, 2015; Tirino, 2019).

Le critiche più disinibite si sono concentrate sulla condotta di Infantino, che incarna più di Al Thani il volto controverso del Mondiale. La dirigenza della FIFA è sotto i riflettori già da tempo per una serie continua di scandali e conflitti che hanno trovato nella persona di Blatter il loro apice (Rowe, 2016) prima di caratterizzare il profilo di Infantino. Questa logica della personalizzazione senza dubbio lascia in ombra i processi e le questioni strutturali del potere, meno facili da inquadrare nell’*infotainment* popolare. Sotto accusa sono, ad esempio, i tentativi di Infantino di silenziare le proteste non solo esterne ma anche interne al campo sportivo. Quando queste ultime sono emerse attraverso le dichiarazioni degli atleti di Danimarca e Germania – generando per la FIFA non poche criticità e tensioni nella gestione dei flussi comunicativi in uscita – le tre testate non hanno colto l’occasione fino in fondo per approfondire le ragioni strutturali di tali contestazioni.

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Towards the amplification of children's rights within Olympic discourses

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Abstract

The intersection of Mega-Sport Events (MSEs) and human rights has given rise to considerable academic commentary over the last number of years. However, within this literature, the treatment of, and engagement with, children's rights law, has been comparably negligible in scope and depth. This has been especially true in relation to how the Olympic Games affect children and young people, and their rights. Against this backdrop, this paper argues that the effect of this marginal treatment has resulted in the peripheralization of important children's rights standards from Olympic discourses. By examining the extant literature on the Olympics and children and young people, in conjunction with an examination of the Concluding Observations and General Comments of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, it argues that the effects of the Olympics on children and young people must now be considered as a distinct children's rights issue. Building on this, and in support of the overarching claim that children's rights must be amplified within Olympic discourses, it further contends that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) must also foreground respect for children's rights within their existing legal and contractual frameworks.

Keywords: Olympics, Children's rights, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, IOC.

1. Introduction

Widely accepted as the "largest multisport event in the world" (Geurin & Naraine, 2020; 1), the International Olympic Games (hereafter 'the Olympics'), which occur every two years, oscillating between its summer and winter editions, are coincidentally sites of immense social, political, economic, and environmental significance (Hayes & Karamichas, 2012). As the world's most recognisable Mega -Sport Event (MSE) (Horne, 2007), the effects of the Olympic Games extend well beyond the outward immediacy of sport itself, and engage a complex, and often intersecting, range of areas, which have a direct and indirect impact on individual human rights. Ranging from the infrastructural and preparatory works necessary for the staging of the Olympics, to the increasing securitisation, marketisation, and commercialisation (Smith & McGivillevray, 2022;

Lenskyj, 2015), associated with the hosting of the Games themselves, individual human rights such as the right to housing, freedom of expression and assembly, amongst others, are routinely sidelined, if not substantively subsumed with the ‘spectacle’ of the Olympic Games (Roche, 2017; Chappelet, 2021). As argued elsewhere, the literature on the Olympics serves to powerfully remind us that mega-sport events (MSEs) “are never solely about sport” (Byrne and Lee Ludvigsen, 2022, p. 467). Cottrell and Nelson (2011, p. 730) argue that the Olympics represent “a structure in which a range of actors at different levels of global society exercise different forms of political power”, whilst in their examination of MSEs, which include the Olympics, Mair et al (2023) argue that they “have a significant effect on a broad range of stakeholders and provide opportunities for catalysing change” (ibid, p. 538). And although the long-term economic, infrastructural, social, and political legacies, or perceived long-term benefits associated with the hosting of a MSE - including the Olympics – are routinely deployed as the justificatory basis for hosting of such an event (Essex& Chalkey, 2010), they have been subject to extensive scrutiny. Indeed, Wolfe’s (2024) summation of the aggregate criticisms which habitually attach to the Olympics as, comprising, *inter alia*, “exorbitant costs, white elephant infrastructures, ecological damage, and harm to local populations” (ibid, p. 2), underscores the various issues which are bound up with the Olympics.

However, despite this, and the wider human rights concerns which have long beleaguered MSEs, the central argument advanced in this paper is that the impact which the Olympics exert on children’s rights, has by comparison remained curiously under-examined within the wider literature on both the MSE and human rights nexus (Heerdt, 2023), and specifically the Olympic and human rights pairing (Chappelet, 2021). The consequence of this, it is contended, is that important and fundamental children’s rights principles, pursuant to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (‘CRC’) (1989), which has been described as “the key international legal instrument for the recognition of the human rights of children” (Doek, 2019, p. 25), have evaded systematic academic scrutiny, such that the impact of the Olympics on children’s rights specifically has not been fully understood, or conceptualised, as a distinct children’s rights issue, warranting increased scholarly attention. Indeed, Aina et al. (2021, p. 2) argue that children’s rights have been ‘less visible’ within both academic and media debates regarding the human rights abuses associated with MSEs. It is further argued that contributing to the marginality which children’s rights occupy within the academic literature on the Olympics in particular, is the peripheral position which the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereafter ‘CRC Committee’), the treaty-monitoring body of the CRC, has accorded to such an issue. Dowse et al (2018, p. 105) further argue that the current invisibility of children’s rights within an MSE context is currently exemplified by ‘the failure to monitor whether they are considered, how they are perceived and how they are impacted’.

Structurally, this paper will be divided into three additional sections. Section one will argue, by invoking the CRC as the legal analytical framework, that the Olympics must now be viewed as a distinct children’s rights issues. By focusing on the Rio 2016 Olympic Games as an example, it will be contended, that more sustained engagement with, and scholarly interrogation of, the overlap of the Olympics and children’s rights is necessary moving forward. Section two will proceed to argue that the CRC Committee must give real and meaningful consideration to the impact of the Olympics on children’s rights within their concluding observations on individual

states parties performance under the CRC. This is necessary, not just as a catalyst for future academic research, but perhaps more significantly, for establishing baseline rights-based expectations when an Olympic edition is hosted within a specific country. This is further necessary to establish best practice from a children's rights perspective in terms of how their rights are given effect to within an Olympic context. By further examining the General Comments thus far issued by the CRC Committee, it will be argued that, although they do not expressly refer to the Olympics, they do provide important guidance which should inform and frame how Host Countries stage an Olympic edition. However, clearer engagement by the CRC Committee on the impact of the Olympics on children's rights is required. Lastly, this paper will set out how the International Olympic Committee can and should give more concrete expression to children's rights standards within their legal, contractual, and operational arrangements with prospective Olympic Host Cities.

2. Children's Rights and the Olympics

As outlined above, the position of children's rights has occupied a nebulous academic footing within the wider discourses surrounding MSEs, including the Olympics. This is despite the fact that, as recently observed by Twyford and Grant (2023), the escalating evidence base associated with such events clearly gives rise to a multiplicity of children's rights issues which attach to the hosting of a MSE, along its entire lifespan. This, by extension includes the Olympics. However, the minimal and insubstantial traction which children's rights has been able to exert on MSEs remains somewhat curious given the almost near ratification – save for the USA – of the CRC, which represents the legal cornerstone of children's rights law. Setting out an all-embracing array of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, the CRC represents “a landmark in the history of childhood” (Freeman, 1996, p. 1). And although human rights (and children's rights) law, ostensibly regulates and mediates the legal relationship between state actors and individuals, the comparatively recent appreciation of the influence and impact of the private sector on human rights (Deva & Bilchitz, 2013), has brought the actions of MSE franchise owners, such as the International Olympic Committee and FIFA under enhanced scrutiny (Byrne and Lee Ludvigsen, 2022). Bolstered by the publication, and widespread acceptance, of the 2011 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which entails the corporate obligation on the private sector to respect human rights, which includes MSE franchise owners (Glinski, 2017), the policies of sport governing bodies are now firmly repositioned against this obligation.

In his analysis of the development of the Olympics in the twenty-first century, Boykoff (2017) argues that they have been typified by several core features including escalating costs, one-use stadia, increased event specific militarisation, the displacement of local population groups in preparation of the Olympics themselves, and a legacy of false promises which have often followed the hosting of the Olympics themselves. Whilst all of these incidents, both individually and collectively, raise serious questions, a deeper analysis unveils profound children's rights concerns. For example, on the issue of displacement of local population groups – which invariably includes children – Gauthier and Alford (2019) remind us that such practices have often occurred under force and coercion. Indeed, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to

adequate housing (UN, 2009), has previously noted the negative and adverse impact of MSEs on the local communities who find themselves subsumed within the operational, infrastructural, and preparatory ambit of a MSE. In noting that “alternatives to evictions are not sufficiently explored, displacement is not accompanied by prior consultation with the affected communities, and adequate compensation or alternative housing is not provided to victims” (ibid, para 16), the Special Rapporteur highlights in unmistakable terms the multifaceted nature of the breach of housing rights which typically accompanies a MSE.

Consequently, from a children’s rights perspective, this generates serious concerns, not least as regards the child’s right to housing and an adequate standard of living, pursuant to Article 27 CRC. As Wind et al (2023, p. 446) recently observed “housing appears to be (at the very least) an essential component for achieving the right to an adequate standard of living for the child’s development”. While noting the paucity of research into the right to housing for children generally, they nonetheless observe that the right to housing occupies a wider rights-fulfilling function, noting its inseparability from other children’s rights, including the right to health, rest, leisure and play, and further the right of the child to both have access to, and protection from, the digital environment (Wind et al, 2023). Indeed, Clair (2019) has previously noted the significance of housing for children’s well-being. In her analysis of homelessness, which by definition also includes children in temporary accommodation, she observed that it generates an “increased risk of chronic health conditions, undernutrition, development delays and problems with cognitive function, as well as reduced likelihood of receiving vaccinations” (2019, p. 620). Therefore, within an Olympic context, where the research has unambiguously evidenced a seemingly implacable practice of forced displacement, as a preparatory protocol deployed as part of the wider infrastructural developments which habitually occur in advance of an Olympic edition (Rocha & Xiao, 2022; Talbot & Carter, 2020; Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, 2007; Blunden, 2012), the need for more nuanced and systematic engagement with how such practices affect children and young people, becomes a genuine concern.

Indeed, one of the permeating undercurrents of the extant literature on the human rights and Olympic nexus has been the discernible dislocation, or sidelining, of children’s rights as a distinct and independent area of inquiry. Whilst a welcome and vast body of scholarship exists which evinces the overarching human rights concerns which invariably arise within an Olympic context (Koenigstorfer, 2023; Chappelet, 2021; Siekmann, 2008; Kidd, 2010), there has been comparably minimal engagement with children and young people, and the bespoke legal framework which governs their rights pursuant to the CRC. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Dowse et al. (2018, p. 99) recount how the ‘invisibility’ of children within MSE discourses – which by extension includes Olympic discussions - is indicative of the wider “failure of existing policy processes to effectively identify and respond to their rights and interests”. On a deeper level, however, such invisibility raises questions of wider theoretical significance. Take for example the sociology of childhood, which “involves moving beyond understandings of childhood as a period of socialisation (the study of what children are becoming) to a sociology that is interested in understanding how children experience their own lives in the ‘here-and-now’” (Freeman, 2020, p. 254). Closely connected with the development of children’s rights law (Mayall, 2000; Freeman, 1998), the sociology of childhood has enlarged the theoretical and discursive parameters in which research with, by, or on, children and young people occurs, such that authentic and contemporary

understandings of issues which affect children can be better understood. As Freeman (2020) suggests, this necessitates moving beyond the assumption that children and young people occupy a homogenous societal grouping, whereby their very status as children and young people represents the *ipso facto* guarantor of equivalence. Rather, Freeman (2020, p. 257) argues that the sociology of childhood means that in recognition of the individuated experiences that children and young people endure, factors such as “gender, race, sexual orientation, disability and all cultural variables become significant” as distinct areas of inquiry which warrant further scrutiny. Therefore, in the context of Olympic-based research, such variables assume increased importance given that the Olympic games, and the disparate national, political, social, and economic contexts in which the Games find themselves, affect children and young people differently. Indeed, when understood, as “a variable of social analysis” (Prout & James, 2005, p. 57), which cannot be entirely disconnected from the above variables, the sociology of childhood offers a robust theoretical lens through which to examine and understand the impact of various phenomena, including the Olympics, on children and young people.

Whilst not the exclusive or sole theoretical perspective against which to position the overlay of the Olympics and children and young people, it is, nonetheless, illustrative, of a theoretical framework which could be deployed to better identify the distinct impact of the Olympics on children and young people in multiple areas. Put another way, the marginal interrogation of children’s rights within Olympic and MSE discourses diminishes the theoretical depth and breadth of our understanding in relation to the overlap of the Olympics and children’s rights. It deprives not just the academy, but also those operating within the MSE ecosystem, of the evidence base upon which to assess the effects of the Olympics, and other MSEs, on children and young people. It further runs the risk of peripheralising children’s rights law, pursuant to the CRC, from the operational ambit of such events. Indeed, by examining one Olympic edition as an exemplar, the *2016 Rio Olympics*, it becomes apparent that the hosting of an Olympic Games raises acute children’s rights concerns, the consequence of which should bring the Olympics (and MSEs more widely) and children’s rights into closer legal alignment.

2.1 Rio 2016 Olympics

The announcement in October 2009 by the IOC in Copenhagen that Rio de Janeiro was to host the 2016 Olympics represented the first time that the Olympic Games was to be staged in South America (IOC, 2009). Consistent with established MSE patterns, whereby the event is positioned as the conduit through which a transformative and wholesale social, urban, and infrastructural renewal are affected, (Chappelet, 2012; Leopkey & Parent, 2013; Spracklen, 2012) the 2016 Rio Olympics were no different. Consequently, the bidding process was premised on the stated aim of using “sport as a catalyst for social integration” (IOC, 2009, p. 42), and where positive legacies were assured across three distinct areas including urban renewal, transport infrastructure, and environment and sanitation (Talbot, 2021). However, as situated right across the literature, and in concert with the somewhat chequered history that post-MSE and Olympic legacies possess, the promised outcomes of the Rio Olympics did not fully materialise (Talbot & Carter, 2020; Boykoff & Mascarenhas, 2016). Talbot (2021) argues that the Games “actively harmed development in a range of ways” (ibid, p. 23), and in recounting examples of displacement,

gentrification, and ecological degradation, demonstrates the adverse consequences which followed from the Rio Olympics. However, such legacy failures are not exclusively indicative of the Rio Olympics, and evidence from other Olympic editions, including London 2012 for instance (Boykoff & Fussey, 2017; Weed, 2013; Watt, 2013) casts doubt on the positive economic and societal effects of the Olympics themselves.

However, from an Olympic standpoint, as Brownill et al (2013, p. 112) remind us, from 2003 onwards, “legacy for hosts and host cities was formally added to the goals in the Olympic Charter ... and therefore became one of the criteria for evaluating bids”. These prospective legacies, and the positive regenerative benefits which are outwardly professed to flow from them (Davies, 2016), are deployed to assuage the wider concerns regarding the oft-cited escalating costs associated with such events. Bocarro et al (2017, p. 21) argue that the notion of “legacy has become a taken-for-granted activity, a concept promoted to justify and legitimise the resources required to host mega events”, while Leal de Oliveir et al (2020, p. 9) state they are used “as a lever to transform the relationship between citizens and state”. Nonetheless, on closer inspection, a clear and discernibly negative nexus can often be extrapolated between the hosting of an Olympic edition and wider human rights concerns (Boykoff, 2019; Kidd, 2010), a reality which was brought into sharp focus by the 2016 Rio Olympics. In highlighting the fact that the Rio Games resulted in not only displacement, but the shuttering of local hospitals, a reduction of social services, an increase of violence in the city’s favelas, enhanced militarization in both the lead up to and during the Games themselves, and inequitable transportation policies, Boykoff (2017) cogently postulates a range of human rights concerns which were directly affiliated with the Rio Olympics. Drilling down deeper into these concerns, several worrying and profound children’s rights concerns arise, despite Brazil ratifying the CRC in 1990.

Firstly, on the issue of the right to housing, the Rio Olympics, as detailed above, represented a flagrant denial of the right to housing for children and young people. With displacement, comes personal, familial, educational, and societal dislocation, which, as outlined earlier, impacts children and young people across several of their rights, including their health, education, development, and well-being. The *World Cup and Olympics Popular Committee of Rio de Janeiro* (2015), a non-governmental organisation, estimated that between 2009 and 2015, over twenty-two thousand families, comprising more than seventy-seven thousand people had been removed from their homes in the lead up to the 2016 Olympics. Such practices, part of a wider process which included “significant gentrification and widespread eviction” (Boykoff, 2017, p. 17) undoubtedly included children and young people. Similarly, Terre des hommes (2016, p. 6), another civil society organisation noted that the home demolitions associated with the Rio Olympic housing policies caused “long-term psychological consequences for many children”. Indeed, in the decade before the Rio Olympics the CRC Committee had urged Brazil to undertake measures to ensure that those from the poorest parts of the country had equal access to housing, amongst other services such as education, and health (CRC Committee, 2004, para 57). Over ten years later, the same Committee in 2015 expressed serious concern about the extent of forced evictions which had occurred in the lead up to the 2014 FIFA World Cup, and the 2016 Olympic Games, noting that such evictions had affected “over 250,000 people, including children, in the implementation of urban infrastructure projects” (CRC Committee, 2015, para 71). In view of the scale of such housing rights violations, and the inevitable knock-on effect it

has on other rights, the need for a more systematic interrogation of how children and young people were afflicted becomes an immediate priority. This is not only necessary to ascertain the broader impact of the Rio Olympics themselves, but given that such practices are now an almost normalised and habitual inevitability which materialise during the preparatory stages of an Olympic edition (Rocha & Xiao, 2022), the need for the establishment of an evidence base, which gives effect to, and provides an understanding of, the impact of such practices on children and young people, is critical to ensure that such violative practices are ultimately eliminated. Indeed, such evidence, moving forward, must also form part of the selection process whereby prospective Host Cities give a clear and detailed outline of how they will avoid such violative conduct when hosting an Olympic edition. However, the accumulation of such evidence is a vital first step in foregrounding the rights of the child within such processes.

Additionally, the Rio Olympics exposed several children's rights violations across multiple areas. The *World Cup and Olympics Popular Committee of Rio de Janeiro* (2015) reported that homeless children and young people were subjected to a 'clean-up' operation, a practice which was typified by the "disappearance of many of them" (ibid, 131). The CRC Committee further observed in 2015 that the Brazilian authorities had been culpable of "torture and enforced disappearances of children during military and other operations by security forces, particularly in favelas" (CRC Committee 2015, para 35a), and further that children and young people were routinely subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention practices. In further expressing alarm at "the very high number of extrajudicial executions of children by the military police" (ibid), the Committee's observations necessitate a deeper analysis of the intersection between the Olympics and children's rights, and the manner in which the former potentially catalysed the negation of the latter. Further concerns were expressed about the "the high and increasing numbers of children involved in prostitution or trafficked for that purpose, as well as the involvement of tourism agencies, hotels and taxi drivers in child sex tourism" (Ibid, para 41b). When positioned against the child's the right to life, survival, and development, pursuant to Article 6 of the CRC, and the right to freedom from violence under Article 19 CRC, such observations assume increased import. Article 6 CRC further represents a general principle of the CRC, meaning that all other rights within the CRC, including the right to housing as alluded to earlier, must be delivered and upheld against Article 6 (Peleg, 2019). Hodgson (1994, p. 369) argues that in its most reductive expression, Article 6 CRC is concerned with "those minimum requirements or basic needs which must be met to sustain human life or perhaps more accurately, to avoid death from preventable causes". In a similar vein, the right to freedom from violence has been further conceptualised as a necessary safeguard for the child's human dignity, and their physical and psychological integrity (CRC Committee, 2011). While the CRC Committee's observations were not explicitly aligned with Brazil's preparations for the Rio Olympics, they do nonetheless exist against the wider backdrop of Brazil's rights-violating conduct, which typified their preparations for the Olympics. Indeed, the timeframe itself provokes wider questions around the heightened vulnerability of children and young people to such egregious breaches of their rights, which included many of them losing their lives (Amnesty International, 2016). Put another way, further research is required to unpack whether the Olympics (or other MSEs) represent a catalyst for states to engage in rights-violating conduct against children and young people, or whether they symbolise an impervious sphere, where rights violating conduct is either excused or overlooked, on account of the prestige of the

Games themselves. Given further that children and young people do not represent a homogenous societal grouping, further research is required to analyse the nature, extent, and manner of such conduct against children and young people along important intersectional lines such as race, poverty, ethnicity, and disability, to name but a few.

Moreover, the evidence presented above - inexhaustive as it is - in view of the paucity of research into the impact of the Olympics on children's rights raises further questions of a procedural nature in relation to children's rights law, and in particular around the procedural traction, and influence, of such rights within an Olympic (and MSE) context. For example, Article 2 CRC enshrines a non-discrimination clause on the grounds of "race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status" (Article 2(1) CRC). While not encasing a freestanding right to non-discrimination (Besson, 2005), it applies to all the rights and entitlements set forth in the convention and serves as a powerful tool in the attainment of meaningful equality between all children and young people. Within the context of the Rio Olympics and taking the documented sexual exploitation of children as an example, it has been noted that the invisibility of such children, on account of their pre-existing social exclusion, marginalisation, skin colour, and status, were all contributory factors leading to the diminution of the illegal and grave nature of such conduct (World Cup and Olympics Popular Committee of Rio de Janeiro, 2015, p. 134). Such observations cast a prominent spotlight on the ability of Article 2 CRC to provide meaningful protection to these children, and further whether public authorities are complying with, or are even aware of, their legal duties under Article 2 CRC. More widely, the need to interrogate the impact of Article 2 CRC within an Olympic (and MSE) context becomes apparent, given the multiple and diverse groups of children and young people that are affected by the event themselves. Indeed, Terre des Hommes (2016, p. 10) noted the racialised implementation of certain transportation policies in advance of the Rio Olympics which were designed "to limit access to more privileged parts of the city to male black youth from the favelas". In the context of street children, who are routinely – and disproportionately – affected by MSEs (Brackenridge et al, 2015), the CRC Committee has previously argued that discrimination against such children leaves them "more vulnerable to violence, abuse, exploitation, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and their health and development are put at greater risk" (CRC Committee, 2017, para 26). Therefore, *Daly et al's* (2022, 450) call for "greater levels of research into the nature of intersectionality, children and the CRC", possesses immense currency within an Olympic related context.

Similarly, an examination of Article 3 CRC, which enshrines the best interests principle, raises further questions regarding how it has been complied with, both before and during the Rio 2016 Olympics. Article 3 in its entirety imposes obligations on states parties to take appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure the child's best interests and well-being, and that those in positions of authority, responsible for the child's care and protection conform to the standards established by the competent authorities in guaranteeing that the best interests of the child are at all times a primary consideration (Freeman, 2007). As the CRC Committee has previously stated, the principle is a "dynamic concept that requires an assessment appropriate to the specific context" (CRC Committee, 2013, para 1) in which children and young people find themselves. Therefore, within an Olympic context which involves vast economic, social, infrastructural, and preparatory efforts, which involve both public and private stakeholders,

whose decisions undoubtedly affect children and young people, the need for the child's best interests to be adhered to becomes apparent. Moreover, the CRC Committee has espoused a useful three-fold conceptual framework underpinning the application of the best-interests principle in practice. Firstly, the Committee has stated that the principle encompasses a substantive right which includes the individual personal right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration. Secondly, the right also amounts to an interpretative legal principle such that when a legal provision is open to more than one meaning, it must be construed in a manner which best serves the child's best interests. Lastly, the Committee has outlined that the principle also includes a procedural rule so that any decision likely to impact children must include an evaluation as to the probable impact such a decision will have on the child's best interests (ibid). Taking the recent Tokyo 2020 Games as an example, Aina et al., (2021, p. 6) found "little evidence that Tokyo 2020 organizers had developed or implemented robust policies, principles or practises to respect, protect and promote child rights in Games planning".

Indeed, moving beyond Olympic planning, evidence has continuously affirmed the deployment of aggressive security and policing practices at, and around, Olympic spaces (Byrne and Lee Luvdigsen 2023; Boykoff, 2017; Toohey & Taylor, 2012). As Kennelly and Watt (2013, 5) concluded, in the context of the London 2012 Games, "increased policing... effectively curtailed the presence of local working class and BME young people in the Olympic public space". This pattern of security aggression also came to pass at the Rio 2016 Olympics where the security presence was described by Boykoff (2017, p. 20) as "formidable". When taken together with the above-mentioned evidence of forced evictions, sexual exploitation and violence, extra-judicial killings, and the arbitrary arrest and detention of children and young people, clear question marks exist pertaining to the manner in which the best interests principle was adhered to at the Rio 2016 Olympics. Indeed, the extent of the documented children's rights violations initiates a deeper sense of questioning regarding the procedural robustness of the principle itself, and how it can better guide and frame the planning and implementation of an Olympic edition, and other MSEs more widely. Therefore, further research is required to fully understand the impact, if any, of the best interests principle, and other children's rights, whether they be procedural or substantive, on those operating within an Olympic context. To bridge this evidential gap within the literature, and gain a better, more nuanced understanding of the individualised and subjective effects which the Olympic Games has on children and young people, more engagement with children's rights law pursuant to the CRC is required.

3. The CRC Committee and the Olympics

Having outlined the need for closer scholarly attention between the Olympics and children's rights, this section now examines the treatment which the Olympics, as an MSE, has received by the CRC Committee itself. Since its entry into force on the 2nd of September 1990, the CRC has borne witness to seventeen Olympic editions. With the exception of the Atlanta Summer Games in 1996, and the Salt Lake City Winter Games in 2002, all other Olympic editions have occurred in countries which have ratified the CRC. However, as this section will demonstrate through an

analysis of the CRC Committee's concluding observations on the countries which have hosted the Olympics, and its general comments, the CRC Committee has accorded only minimal attention to the Olympics as a children's rights issue. Following this, it will be argued that a much more comprehensive approach is required, such that the children's rights implications of the Olympics are fully appreciated by the CRC Committee.

3.1 Concluding Observations

From a human rights perspective, O'Flaherty (2006) argues that the issuance of concluding observations represents one of the most significant activities of international human rights treaty-monitoring bodies. He argues that they not only give a detailed appraisal of a country's human rights performance, but furthermore provide an opportunity to stimulate human rights improvements through the advice and guidance they also contain. As Mechlem (2009, p. 923) argues, they "reflect a consensus on how the provisions of a treaty should be interpreted with regard to the particular situation in a country". However, an analysis of the CRC's concluding observations reveals that the CRC Committee's engagement with how the lifespan of an Olympic edition affects children and young people is both muted and minimal. Despite the welcome comments in relation to Brazil's performance as referred to earlier, and how specific practices associated with the Olympics directly impacted children's rights across several areas, the CRC committee's appraisal more widely on how the Olympic Games engage children's rights has been negligible.

Taking China as an example, the CRC Committee's 2013 concluding observations made no reference to the 2008 Olympic Summer Games (CRC Committee, 2013), which were hosted against a backdrop of relentless allegations of human rights violations (Liu, 2006). Research published by the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions in 2007 suggested that "by April 2007, at least 1.25 million people have already been displaced as a result of urban development linked to the Olympic Games, and unknown numbers of these people have been evicted forcibly" (ibid, p. 154). Further evidence suggested that as a result of the Olympic-based developments in China, "as many as 33,000 people with sustainable livelihoods were pushed into poverty, or deeper poverty, because their homes and neighbourhoods were demolished" (ibid). While such practices generate serious questions concerning the rights of those who were displaced or evicted to the right to housing and an adequate standard of living, the failure by the CRC Committee to refer to such practices, even cursorily, given the inevitable impact they would have had on children, represented an anomalous omission. Similarly, in advance of Russia hosting the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi, clear evidence emerged of persistent human rights abuses which were directly connected with those Olympics. This ranged from the exploitation of migrant workers (Human Rights Watch, 2013) which indirectly affected the workers families and children, the curtailment of the freedom of assembly, protest, and expression rights (Boykoff, 2017), to the Games happening in the shadows of the enactment of draconian anti-LGBT legislation (Davidson & McDonald, 2020), which clearly interfered with the right to non-discrimination and equality for children and young people. Whilst the CRC Committee did express concern regarding the impact of this legislation in their 2014 concluding observations (CRC Committee, 2014), the overall

comments were again devoid of any reference to the Olympic Games, or the connection between the Olympics and wider state-endorsed practices and children's rights. Similar omissions characterised the CRC's 2014 Committee's concluding observations on the United Kingdom, which came two years after the conclusion of the London 2012 Olympic Summer Games. Again, with clear evidence of displacement, coupled with the pre-Game's enactment of event-specific legislation which severely curtailed expression and assembly rights in and around Olympic 'spaces' (Byrne and Lee Ludvigsen 2023), no reference to any of these rights-infringing practices were alluded to within the concluding observations (CRC Committee, 2016).

Therefore, when positioned against the wider acceptance of the role and reach of the private sector, which includes MSE franchise owners, and their impact on human rights, the failure to consider the momentous nature of an Olympic edition within a country's concluding observations represents a curious omission. Given the prestigious nature of the Olympics, such comments could act as a valuable and informative reference point about how best to give effect to children's rights within prospective Olympic contexts. This ongoing omission represents a missed opportunity by the CRC Committee to positively impact this consequential field.

3.2 General Comments

From a human rights perspective, general comments play an important role in unpacking the obligatory and necessary conduct expected of states in furtherance of the realization of the rights contained within human rights treaties, including the CRC. Despite the non-binding nature of such comments (International Law Association, 2004), and their mutable status within the international legal order, such comments, in amplifying the scope and meaning of specific human rights nonetheless "play a substantive role in the elaboration of standards and possible future custom within the complex matrix of international law" (Gerber et al, 2013, p. 101). Alston (2010, p. 5) argues that they "address in a comprehensive fashion the substantive content of some of the major rights" within human rights treaties, whilst Bodig (2016, p. 70) observes "they offer the opportunity of securing a foothold within the UN system for more progressive interpretation of human rights norms" and "can be more responsive to the ever-shifting challenges of human rights protection" (ibid). Indeed, one of those challenges is how best to bring children's rights standards to bear on the staging of an Olympic edition, from the bidding process right through to the legacies which are routinely promised at the close of an Olympic edition.

Whilst none of the CRC general comments explicitly address the children's rights obligations which attach to the state when hosting a MSE, including an Olympic edition, some nonetheless contain important guidance about how to mediate, and better rights-proof the activities of the private sector, including the IOC, as franchise owner of the Olympic games. Müller (2018) outlines the four defining features of a MSE as including visitor attractiveness, mediated reach, cost, and urban transformation. Thus, within these four discrete areas, one can see how children's rights are engaged across several fronts. From a children's rights perspective, General Comment No. 16 on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights (CRC Committee, 2013), is unequivocal in its recognition that businesses, in all their iterations possess the capacity to negatively affect children's rights. In describing the private sector as "including all

business enterprises, both national and transnational, regardless of size, sector, location, ownership and structure”, MSE franchise owners, including the IOC, clearly fall within such parameters. Whilst the guidance set out in the General Comment No.16 is directed towards states, who bear the legal duty to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights, they do contain significance procedural protections which are directly relevant within an Olympic context. This includes preventing “discrimination in the private sphere in general” (ibid, para 14), guaranteeing that “the best interests of the child are central to the development of legislation and policies that shape business activities and operations”(ibid, para 15), ensuring that the measures for implementing Article 6 CRC with regard to the business sector are “adapted according to context” (ibid, para 20) and listening to children and young people views “when developing national and local-level business-related laws and policies that may affect them” (ibid, para 21). Such guidance demonstrates that respecting children’s rights within an Olympic context requires the adoption of pro-active, and context-specific measures to ensure that children’s rights are not mere vassal entitlements. This demands that Host Countries have appropriate measures in place to mitigate against the enduring human rights concerns which have long-beleaguered the hosting of an Olympiad, including displacement, gentrification, the negative consequences of urban renewal, state-sanctioned ‘clean up’ operations, and other rights-infringing practices. From a children’s rights perspective, this necessitates that prospective Host Cities are firstly, fully aware of how children’s rights are in fact affected by an Olympic edition, and that secondly, they use such evidence as the basis upon which to implement and adopt appropriate measures and policies, to counteract the specific risks associated with, or generated by, an Olympic edition for children and young people. Indeed, as Byrne and Lundy (2015, p. 274), rightfully remind us, the “obligations under the CRC are not meant to be taken lightly, yet remain largely confined to the margins of policymaking”.

More widely, guidance issued by the CRC Committee across other disparate areas are of direct relevance within an Olympic context. General Comment No. 14 on the child’s best interests principle (CRC Committee, 2013), and General Comment No. 12 on the right of the child to be heard in matters that affect them (CRC Committee, 2009) provide further substantive and explanatory detail regarding how those important procedural rights are to be complied with. Given that states ultimately apply for the staging of an Olympic edition and invest the necessary resources into operationalising such an event, it remains imperative that children’s procedural rights are centralised within such processes. Whilst these general comments do not explicitly mention MSEs, or the Olympics, the guidance contained within them is equally applicable to such events. In sum, they combine to articulate the substantive duties expected of the state wherever and whenever children’s rights are engaged, which clearly extends to an Olympic edition. Similarly, the CRC Committee’s General Comment No. 21 on street children, whilst silent on the Olympics, does nonetheless state that “harassment, violence, round-ups and street sweeps of children in street situations, including in the context of major political, public or sporting events, or other interventions that restrict or interfere with their rights to association and peaceful assembly, contravene article 15 (2)” of the CRC (CRC Committee, 2017, para 39). Additionally, the most recent General Comment No.26 on children’s environmental rights unambiguously asserts that states “shall protect children against environmental damage from other sources and third parties, including by regulating business enterprises” (CRC Committee,

2023, para 68). The CRC Committee's explicit recognition of the causal connection between the actions of the private sector and children's environmental rights, is an important step forward towards the ongoing and future protection of children's rights. This assumes increased significance in view of the well documented environmental and ecological damage that various Olympic editions have directly caused (Geeraert & Gauthier, 2018). Taking the Rio 2016 Olympics as an example, Boykoff and Mascarenhas (2016) underscore several environmental failures associated with Rio, including the failure to plant the required number of trees to offset the event's carbon emissions and the construction of Olympic infrastructure, including the Olympic Golf Course, in an ecologically sensitive area (Vercillo, 2015). Additionally, children possess the human right to have their voices and views heard in matters which affect them under Article 12 CRC. Clearly engaged within an Olympic context, whereby the hosting of an Olympiad affects children in multiple areas of their lives, the CRC Committee has stated that the views of children "add relevant perspectives and experience and should be considered in decision-making, policymaking and preparation of laws and/or measures as well as their evaluation" (CRC Committee, 2009, para 12).

Therefore, although dispersed across the textual substance of various CRC General Comments, important and necessary guidance pertaining to how states can give effect to children's rights within an Olympic context exists, although somewhat obliquely. Whilst not always explicitly framed within an Olympic, or MSE context, the guidance is nonetheless equally applicable to such situations. The challenge now moving forward is for those operating within an Olympic, or MSE context, to actively engage with such guidance, and to bring the legal duties which they amplify and delineate to bear on how states prepare for, and implement, the hosting of an Olympic edition.

4. Towards children rights-proofing the Olympics

Having outlined the various children's rights concerns associated with the Olympics, this section now argues that increased scope exists within the regulatory and operational reach of the IOC, to better foreground children's rights protections, in how it engages with prospective Host Countries who are seeking to stage an Olympic edition. Given that all prospective Host Countries, - except for the USA – have ratified the CRC, the logical extension of such near universal ratification, is that explicit reference should now be made to the CRC within all contractual arrangements between the IOC and future Host Countries, at all stages of an Olympiad. Undoubtedly, the IOC have made significant progress in centralising respect for human rights within their organisational arrangements. This has included the approval of changes to the Olympic Charter in October 2023 (James, 2023), which, in amending Principle 1, now makes explicit reference to "internationally recognised human rights" (IOC, 2023). Such changes have followed previous institutional human rights developments by the IOC, which have included the adoption of the recommendations advanced in 2020 for an IOC Human Rights Strategy (Al Hussein and Davis, 2020), and the articulation within the Olympic Agenda 2020 + 5 (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2019), of Recommendation 13 which contained the pledge underpinning the recent human rights changes to the Olympic Charter. Such developments followed the

significant alterations to the contractual arrangements between the IOC and future Host Countries in 2017 (Chappelet, 2021), which, pursuant to Article 13 thereof, now contains an obligation on Host Countries to “protect and respect human rights and ensure any violation of human rights is remedied in a manner consistent with international agreements, laws and regulations applicable in the Host Country” (IOC, 2017. 13.2b).

However, despite these welcome changes, it is contended that more needs to be done as regards the intersection of the IOC and children’s rights (Byrne and Lee Ludvigsen, 2023). Whilst the above referenced changes are indeed welcome, the failure to explicitly refer to children’s rights, and the CRC, represents a missed opportunity for the IOC to drive forward a positive child rights-compliant culture within this area. As Heerdt (2018) as previously noted, direct reference was made by UEFA, as a comparable sports franchise owner, to respect for child rights within the ‘Tournament Requirements’ and ‘Bid Dossier’ for the EURO 2024 tournament. Nonetheless, in practical terms, the ongoing hesitancy by the IOC to directly include respect for children’s rights within their Charter or wider legal and contractual frameworks, possesses the capacity to expel children’s rights considerations, and the distinct procedural safeguards which the CRC imposes on states, to the outer margins of the preparatory, infrastructural, economic, and social discourses which surround the bidding for, and hosting of, an Olympic edition. As earlier outlined, the impact of the Olympics on children’s rights is both searing and unequivocal. Therefore, to avoid Host Cities from circumventing their children’s rights obligations, the IOC must give clearer expression to children’s rights within their institutional and legal frameworks, and further mandate that prospective Host Countries carry out children’s rights impact assessments, when bidding for future Olympiads to ensure that children’s rights are centralised within the planning and preparatory stages of such an event (Byrne and Lee Ludvigsen 2023). Put another way, the time has surely come for the IOC to fully explain and justify the continued omission of children’s rights from their institutional protocols.

More widely, it is contended that embedding respect for children’s rights within the bidding stages of an Olympic edition possesses a wider accountability function. By compelling prospective Host Countries to demonstrate how they would respect children’s rights law in both preparing for, and hosting, an Olympic edition, a clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder – whether at national, local, or municipal level – involved within an Olympic edition can be better acquired, and understood, regarding their children’s rights obligations. Importantly, the extent therefore to which they have complied with their respective children’s rights obligations can be objectively assessed, and critiqued. Connectedly, this could also assist non-governmental organisations, described as ‘key actors in human rights protection efforts’ (Clark and Danyi, 2023, p. 45) to further hold Host Countries accountable in relation to the impact of the Olympics on children’s rights. And although imperfections do exist within the NGO human rights monitoring system as regards children and young people (Collins, 2008), they do nonetheless add an important, influential, and persuasive evidential layer in relation to the issues under scrutiny. Therefore, within an Olympic context, the formalised inclusion of respect for children’s rights within the bidding stages, and how Host Countries would give effect to such rights during an Olympiad, could potentially galvanise local, national, and international NGO’s to robustly assess the impact of the Olympics on children’s rights.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has argued for the Olympic Games to be considered as a distinct children's rights issue. Further to this, it has claimed that greater scholarly attention is now required to fully ascertain the impact which the Games have on children and young people, and further for a clearer articulation of the children's rights implications which flow from the Olympics, from the CRC Committee. As contended, this is necessary to bridge the gap within the literature, which has thus far comparably accorded insufficient attention to children's rights. Within the vast MSE ecosystem, and the multi-layered and multi-stakeholder legal framework which underpins it, children's rights must now be given clearer expression. By invoking the Rio 2016 Olympics as an example, this article has demonstrated the manifold ways in which the Olympic Games can – and often do - egregiously violate children's rights. Against this context, it can no longer remain the case that the rights of children and young people are viewed in incidental or generalist terms within an Olympic context. Therefore, if the IOC is to genuinely effectuate its professed commitment to human rights, then children's rights, pursuant to the CRC, must be visibly foregrounded within their legal and institutional frameworks.

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Dall'antropologo da tavolino a quello da tastiera. L'antropologia senza etnografia?

Dal Lago, A. (2022) *Sangue nell'ottagono. Antropologia delle arti marziali miste*. Bologna: Il Mulino

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Abstract

Sangue nell'ottagono is an anthropological study of the “global show” of mixed martial arts. Alessandro Dal Lago, one of the most influential Italian sociologists of recent decades, explores both the overt and the “implicit and subcutaneous” meanings and representations of such a hyper-violent performance. In doing so, he adopts an anthropological perspective (and some influential anthropological theories) while “proudly” rejecting ethnography as a useful methodology for understanding both the “front stage” and “backstage” moments of MMA fights. The result is a semiotic and speculative analysis of the inherent messages of professional MMA shows that overlooks the ways in which these “messages” are continually “coded” and “decoded” by the different subjects – and people – involved. Is “anthropological” research possible without understanding how meanings are dialectically produced and negotiated at a local level?

Keywords: Mixed martial arts, MMA, Anthropology, Ethnography.

1. Un antropologo “da tastiera”?

In quello che tristemente è stato l'ultimo volume pubblicato da Alessandro Dal Lago prima della morte, il grande sociologo offre al pubblico italiano un'analisi degli aspetti “culturali” di un fenomeno sportivo in rapida e continua ascesa dagli anni Novanta del secolo scorso, che colpisce per il contenuto di brutalità e violenza: le arti marziali miste (MMA). Si tratta di una disciplina “senza esclusione di colpi” o quasi, una forma di “combattimento totale” che ha espresso tutta la sua vocazione mediatica soprattutto negli Stati Uniti, e che oggi occupa “il terzo posto nella classifica degli sport *più popolari al mondo*, dopo il calcio e la pallacanestro” (p. 8).¹ Obiettivo dell'autore è quello di offrire di questo “*show globale*” (25) “un'interpretazione antropologica” (29).

¹ In realtà la fonte riportata da Dal Lago è confutabile: difficile trovare stime affidabili e coerenti sul seguito dei diversi sport nel mondo, ma quella offerta nel testo sembra non prendere in considerazione la popolarità del cricket, per esempio, o del tennis, o della pallavolo, ecc.

Per farlo, propone una lettura delle “MMA come performance” (18), a partire dalla teoria del rito di Victor Turner (1993; 2001), e dunque dai concetti di “dramma sociale” e di “fenomeno liminoide” che ne costituiscono i fondamenti. Da questa prospettiva, l'autore suggerisce ragionevolmente di osservare le MMA come “rappresentazioni e al tempo stesso tipi di esperienza reale che fanno venire alla luce il ‘non detto’ o meglio le realtà ‘sottocutanee’ della vita sociale” (19). Attività “performative” che “riflettono” una parte del mondo sociale e culturale in cui si svolgono, rendendolo visibile e permettendoci dunque di comprenderlo meglio.

Rivendicando “fieramente il [suo] ruolo di spettatore mediale, versione post-moderna di un *armchair anthropologist*” (28), Dal Lago si propone tuttavia di analizzare unicamente la parte “emersa” del fenomeno, i suoi aspetti più immediatamente visibili, quelli che possono essere rintracciati anche online o sui media, a partire dai “filmati dei combattimenti, gli abbondanti materiali forniti dai professionisti (autobiografie, interviste, post sui siti e social ecc.)” (29). In fondo, sostiene lo studioso, “Oggi [...] con un paio di clic sulla tastiera del computer o digitando su un telefono cellulare, chiunque può guardare un combattimento di MMA professionistiche su YouTube, sui siti delle televisioni private e dei quotidiani online, oltre che su quelli specializzati” (14); e questo è sufficiente, a suo avviso, per comprendere la rilevanza sociale e culturale del fenomeno. Ma un approccio di questo tipo, che in virtù di un esplicito e programmatico orientamento metodologico ed epistemologico sceglie di non tenere in considerazione “gli umori e gli odori delle palestre di periferia” (*ibidem*) – e più in generale gli ambienti di pratica, le voci e le traiettorie biografiche degli attori a vario titolo coinvolti in queste attività, nonché le modalità di fruizione (si suppone, variabili in relazione alle diverse realtà geografiche e sociali) e le motivazioni di chi segue le esibizioni in tv o sul web – è davvero conciliabile con il progetto di una “antropologia delle arti marziali miste”?

Mentre da tempo l'antropologia cerca di riconoscere una propria specificità teorica e metodologica proprio nella comprensione dei modi in cui i fenomeni, anche quelli più globalizzati, si organizzano a livello locale e vengono *agiti* dalle persone (mostrando per esempio *Come il mondo ha cambiato i social media*: Miller *et al.* 2018),² Dal Lago adotta un approccio “antropologico” per sostenere invece come un “fenomeno sportivo-spettacolare-mediale” (29) come quello delle MMA professionistiche possa essere letto direttamente a partire dalle sue caratteristiche intrinseche e più evidenti, senza fare affidamento su un'osservazione che restituisca nella sua complessità l'esperienza empirica (le “pratiche”) di quanti vi si dedicano come praticanti o lo seguono da spettatori. L'obiettivo del sociologo è quello di leggere, nella trasparenza di questo “gioco profondo”, quella “universalità di sentire e di vedere” che anche Eco (1964, p. 221) – o, per rimanere in ambito sportivo, Roland Barthes (2016) – individuava nei prodotti della “cultura di massa”. Una lettura “semiotica” del fenomeno – o se non altro marcatamente speculativa –, che trascende e lascia in secondo piano il ruolo degli attori sociali: quanto di più distante, insomma, dalla prospettiva etnografica che caratterizza la conoscenza antropologica.

Al ricercatore (formato per farlo) spetterebbe secondo l'autore il compito di comprendere e decifrare “i significati dominanti, interni ed esterni”, così come quelli “sottocutanei” e impliciti” (26), contenuti nel fenomeno delle MMA professionistiche per come esso viene forgiato (“codificato”, nel lessico di Hall, 1973) dall’“industria culturale” che si occupa della sua

² Si vedano anche a questo proposito, solo per citare alcune delle opere più note, Appadurai (2001); Douglas e Isherwood (2013); Miller (1987).

organizzazione, promozione e trasmissione mediatica. Questo a prescindere dalle modalità concrete con cui, per esempio, gli attori (i “fighter”) preparano lo show, nel periodo che precede l’“esibizione”, nella quotidianità dei loro allenamenti e delle relazioni che instaurano con i loro manager, con gli sponsor, con gli allenatori, con i familiari, con gli amici, con il loro pubblico (insomma, in quello che Dal Lago, prendendo in prestito la terminologia goffmaniana, chiama il “retroscena” di una “ribalta” che dura solo qualche minuto o, nei casi più fortunati, qualche anno di carriera ai massimi livelli). A prescindere, anche, da come lo show viene fruito (“decodificato”, sempre secondo Hall) da chi lo segue come spettatore. Una prospettiva da critica francofortiana all’industria culturale, che trascura non solo le acquisizioni dell’antropologia contemporanea, ma anche una buona parte di quelle della sociologia qualitativa. Eppure, come lo stesso autore ricorda, le reazioni all’ascesa delle MMA come spettacolo globale non sono state esattamente unanimi e trasversali³, e i combattimenti risultano anzi “urtanti agli occhi di molti” (9). Soprattutto, ammette Dal Lago, risultano insopportabili agli occhi di alcune delle persone ad elevato capitale culturale che compongono la sua cerchia di frequentazioni, tra cui una “medico internista e psicoterapeuta, [che] si rifiuta di vedere i filmati dei combattimenti e non vuole leggere quello che ne vado scrivendo da qualche anno, né sentirne parlare” (7). Atteggiamenti che sembrano evidentemente rivelatori di reazioni distintive di “disgusto”, in pieno senso bourdiesiano, su cui tuttavia l’autore non ritiene utile soffermarsi – come se, di nuovo, quello che conta in un’analisi di questo tipo fossero soprattutto il “prodotto” culturale e le sue caratteristiche intrinseche, e non gli usi che ne vengono fatti e i modi socialmente orientati con cui le persone vi si confrontano.

2. L’irragionevole “prezzo del sangue”

Così, da una parte Dal Lago smaschera la forza coercitiva delle grandi aziende e dei vari soggetti coinvolti nella produzione e nel finanziamento di questo sempre più trascinante fenomeno di massa. Dall’altra parte, delinea in maniera impressionistica una schiera di consumatori anonimi e di operai alienati (“migliaia di professionisti o semi-dilettanti”: p. 117, corsivo nell’originale) che sembrano non avere alcun ruolo nella definizione dei significati della “cultura” delle MMA, e che, per quattro spiccioli, mettono la loro vita e la loro incolumità fisica al servizio degli interessi economici di terzi, in uno sport in cui (viene ripetuto molte volte nel testo) “si combatte per soldi – non per la fama, la gloria della comunità o città o per qualsiasi prescrizione rituale” (22). E tuttavia, alla luce delle considerazioni che vengono fatte nel Capitolo Quarto (“Il prezzo del sangue”) in relazione ai compensi medi dei lottatori (mediamente molto bassi, con l’eccezione di pochissime superstar), ci si chiede perché mai una persona debba esporsi al rischio di danni fisici (o, nella migliore delle ipotesi, ad allenamenti sfiancanti e usuranti) per un tornaconto economico che, di fatto, non esiste. È solo in nome della speranza (illusoria) di una possibile “ribalta”, e dunque in virtù di una “falsa coscienza”, che i lottatori si sottopongono a sforzi e traumi di ogni tipo? Forse, le ragioni sociali e culturali per cui queste persone decidono di rischiare la vita a questo prezzo avrebbero meritato di essere indagate più a fondo, in quella che vuole essere una

³ In Francia, per esempio, i combattimenti di MMA sono stati formalmente proibiti fino al 2020, e solo nel 2023 si è tenuto in territorio francese un incontro professionistico finanziato da un’organizzazione bulgara.

ricerca “più interessata alla cultura (simboli norme, rituali, performance ecc.) che non alle dimensioni strutturali [del] fenomeno” (19). Insomma, se “ribalta” e “retroscena” sono realtà così distanti come l’autore le descrive, perché la sua analisi si è concentrata (“fieramente”) solo sui prodotti della ribalta? Su internet, sulla stampa o nei documentari si trovano solo le parti mediatizzate dei racconti di questi fighter che non arrivano a fine mese, delle illusioni stroncate di combattenti promettenti eccetera; non valeva allora forse la pena prendere in considerazione anche le traiettorie biografiche, l’origine sociale e i riferimenti culturali di questi “lavoratori dello spettacolo” di cui difficilmente si può dire che combattano solo “per soldi”, da quanto emerge contraddittoriamente dalle stesse considerazioni di Dal Lago?

Di fatto, nel capitolo successivo è l’autore stesso a chiarire – ricorrendo al concetto di “gioco profondo” elaborato da Clifford Geertz (2001) – come ci sia poco di spiegabile da un punto di vista razionale o economicista nella scelta di dedicarsi alle MMA, una pratica in cui “la posta in gioco” non può essere individuata esclusivamente nel denaro, ma deve essere rintracciata in “un complesso di motivi che includono ciò che è variamente chiamato ‘onore’, ‘prestigio’, ‘orgoglio’, ‘faccia’, ‘identità’” (126), nonché nell’“idea di sfida o competizione – con sé e con altri, con i membri della propria comunità, con il mondo e con il destino” (124-125). Una questione assiologica, insomma, oltre che (o prima che) economica.

3. “Un’immagine nuova di femminilità”: i corpi delle combattenti come “strumento di lavoro”?

A questo proposito (e cioè in relazione alla dimensione culturale, oltre che strutturale, del fenomeno), è interessante notare, come fa l’autore, che un ruolo fondamentale nell’affermazione mediatica internazionale delle MMA è stato giocato “indubbiamente – contro ogni possibile previsione – da una donna, Ronda Rousey” (105), che grazie a una particolare “cattiveria” sportiva e mediale [...] ha dato] vita a un’immagine nuova di femminilità, non femminista in senso ideologico, ma sicuramente lontana dall’idea conservatrice della donna ‘dolce’ e ‘mite’” (107). Si tratta a mio avviso di una delle parti più rilevanti del testo. Respingendo un’idea ancora diffusa nel senso comune secondo cui l’aggressività (e dunque la lotta) sarebbe dominio esclusivamente o prevalentemente maschile, nella parabola dell’ascesa di Ronda Rousey Dal Lago scorge l’esito di un più generale processo di trasformazione della cultura del corpo che avrebbe caratterizzato la nostra società negli ultimi decenni, e che ha trovato appunto nelle MMA un ambito paradigmatico di espressione: “La classica idea del corpo femminile come bene da proteggere, curare e abbellire [...] è stata rimpiazzata da tempo, negli sport di combattimento (ma non solo), da quella del corpo come strumento di lavoro che può essere usato e quindi usurato” (142). Di nuovo, ho tuttavia l’impressione che l’autore giunga alle sue conclusioni in maniera troppo sbrigativa: quello che viene celebrato nelle MMA, infatti, non è soltanto il corpo-macchina, ovvero un corpo funzionale alla produttività, secondo l’accezione weberiana della formula (Weber 1991; si veda anche Guttmann 2004). Il corpo-atletico messo in mostra dai (e dalle) fighter, oltre a incarnare ormai anche per le donne le caratteristiche del corpo-bello (molte dive contemporanee esibiscono del resto gambe e glutei forgiati da ore di *squat*), diventa un monumento al culto contemporaneo della volontà, una prova concreta del fatto che l’atleta ha

svolto quel “lavoro su se stessa” che a ciascuno di noi è richiesto, secondo una concezione ormai diffusa del successo (e della forza, e della bellezza) come responsabilità individuale: una qualità che si può (e si deve) raggiungere attraverso la dedizione e l’impegno, adempiendo all’imperativo per cui *“impossible is nothing”*, basta volerlo.

4. Le MMA e la militarizzazione della cultura americana

Guardando alle arti marziali miste come “dramma sociale”, Dal Lago legge il fenomeno come espressione della società in cui si è affermato in quanto “show globale”, quella statunitense. Le MMA diventano, ai suoi occhi di scienziato sociale, “buone per pensare” alcuni dei “significati dominanti” e impliciti della cultura americana. Tra questi, in particolare, “l’osmosi di cultura militare e vita civile” (158) che si sarebbe verificata nella trasformazione storica del modello dei conflitti per così dire campali (fino alla Seconda guerra mondiale) in strategie belliche via via sempre più ramificate e diffuse, che prevedono anche la guerriglia urbana e che coinvolgono dunque la popolazione civile (anche se, direi, non quella americana) e prevedono fasi di scontro ravvicinato e l’eventualità del combattimento corpo a corpo. Quello che non convince del tutto di questa interessante tesi, che viene ripresa anche nelle conclusioni, è che Dal Lago sembra volerla affermare in maniera deduttiva, in virtù di un’inferenza che pure non viene confermata da molti dei dati che l’autore stesso riporta.

Prima di tutto, infatti, sia il fenomeno della lotta “senza esclusione di colpi” che quello della formazione militare al combattimento corpo a corpo hanno origini importanti e profonde anche fuori dagli Stati Uniti – e probabilmente anche a questo si deve la rapida ascesa globale delle MMA. Le forze di difesa israeliane, per esempio, avevano elaborato e adottato già negli anni Quaranta del Novecento un sistema di combattimento corpo a corpo che potesse risultare efficace per i militari in situazioni di scontro reale in contesti da guerriglia urbana, il Krav Maga, che negli anni Novanta ha avuto poi anche una certa diffusione internazionale come disciplina para-sportiva (Mor, 2019). In Giappone, dove il combattimento ha legami storici profondi – e tuttora significativi per una parte della popolazione – con il pensiero, con la letteratura, con la cultura pop e con la vita pubblica, due organizzazioni professionistiche di arti marziali miste, la Shooto e la Pride, organizzavano già i loro incontri, rispettivamente, dalla fine degli anni Ottanta e dai primi Novanta, e hanno verosimilmente offerto un modello di riferimento ai promotori della UFC americana, il circuito commerciale e competitivo inaugurato nel 1993 e dal quale la disciplina ha poi guadagnato la sua fama internazionale. E in Brasile il *vale tudo* “(in portoghese, ‘tutto è permesso’), arte marziale mista e senza regole, che può essere considerata la vera antesignana delle MMA” (79) si era affermato già nella seconda metà degli anni Venti del secolo scorso. Come Dal Lago chiarisce, dunque, gli Stati Uniti sono semmai il contesto in cui, grazie a una serie di contingenze e di investimenti da parte di alcuni professionisti dello spettacolo e del “*big business*” in generale, le MMA sono diventate uno “show globale”. Ma la loro origine non è distintamente americana, e la popolazione americana non è il solo grande bacino di utenza, in virtù di una “militarizzazione” che la riguarderebbe in maniera appunto quasi esclusiva.

In secondo luogo, le MMA affondano i loro significati “profondi” anche in altri ambiti del sociale, diversi e non necessariamente connessi con quello militare: tra questi, l’economia; la concezione

“neoliberista” della vita e del sé come progetto da realizzare; la connessa “idea di libertà prevalente nelle nostre società” (94), che ha molto a che fare con la “libertà d’impresa” (82) e dunque con la necessità di affermare i talenti individuali anche andando contro le “imposizioni” sociali – per cui il combattimento diventa metafora dell’individuo che si afferma su tutti gli altri, a discapito della separazione dei ruoli e delle tecniche che caratterizzano ciascuna disciplina di combattimento “tradizionale”; nonché, chiaramente, le rappresentazioni cinematografiche (e mediatiche in generale, con fumetti, videogiochi, ecc.) di queste nuove concezioni dell’individuo-contro-tutti (questa volta sì, incrociate anche con la guerra: da *Rambo* a Van Damme, da Bruce Lee a *Million dollar baby*, da *Karate Kid* a *Street Fighter* o all’*Uomo Tigre*, e così via – non tutti prodotti americani, tra l’altro).

Da questo punto di vista, mi sembra che più che il militarismo, l’aspetto peculiare della cultura statunitense sia la spettacolarizzazione cinematografica (e, più in generale, drammaturgica e performativa) di queste qualità, e l’eroicizzazione dell’individuo-che-si-impone, attraverso la propria volontà, su un mondo tendenzialmente ostile (anche in guerra, certo, ma in una prospettiva in cui la guerra assume più i tratti della metafora che quelli di una concreta necessità). Non a caso, citando il kolossal *Million dollar baby*, l’autore sostiene che “Qui, il combattimento è evidente metafora della realizzazione di sé” (68) – il che offre in parte anche una spiegazione al ruolo delle atlete donne nelle MMA, cui ho fatto cenno sopra. E se nel film di Clint Eastwood la protagonista riesce a realizzarsi in un contesto che certo non le è favorevole, ma in cui comunque l’apparato regolamentario e istituzionale del fenomeno sportivo è garantito, le MMA si spingono oltre, proponendosi come un ambito deregolamentato (“liberista”) di confronto (“concorrenza”) tra individui che possono confrontarsi liberamente, senza dover sottostare a nessuna costrizione formale o stilistica. “Le MMA rompevano la compartimentazione tradizionale degli stili di lotta e quindi, come sostiene David Mamet, rappresentano da allora una celebrazione della libertà d’impresa e della globalizzazione” (82).

Tutto questo, anche volendo rimanere a un livello superficiale da critica all’industria culturale, non ha molto a che fare col militarismo e con la “guerra moderna”. L’imperativo della realizzazione di sé a ogni costo – anche contro le regole imposte dalla società e dalle istituzioni –, del resto, mal si concilia con gli assunti del militarismo, che tendenzialmente prevedono invece che un individuo si sottoponga completamente all’istituzione, per un bene superiore – la patria – e in nome di uno spirito corporativo che non può tollerare protagonismi o colpi di testa, ma solo “ordine e disciplina”. Più che quello dell’uomo disciplinato al servizio del corpo (militare), l’imperativo nel caso delle MMA mi sembra quello dell’uomo al servizio di se stesso, indisciplinato nella misura in cui le norme limitano il suo progetto di affermazione.

D’altro canto, sostenere che la diffusione delle MMA nella cultura euro-americana trovi una spiegazione nel militarismo che avrebbe caratterizzato in anni recenti tale cultura lascia non pochi dubbi. La guerra e il militarismo hanno avuto per esempio un’influenza profonda anche all’origine di quelle arti marziali orientali cui attribuiamo oggi una valenza riflessiva e filosofica, molte delle quali sono state codificate proprio a partire da tecniche belliche, per poi essere trasformate in discipline fisiche pedagogiche e, nel senso più ampio, conoscitive. La connessione tra pratiche fisiche e militarismo non è esclusiva dei nostri tempi, insomma, né della cultura euro-americana.

5. Il combattimento senza combattenti, e l'antropologia senza etnografia

Pur dichiarando di adottare come argomento interpretativo la lettura turneriana del rito come “dramma sociale” (il cui carattere innovativo stava proprio nel cogliere il potenziale anti-strutturale delle fasi “liminali” o “liminoidi” del processo rituale), Dal Lago guarda alla performance sportiva solo come espressione (o “riflesso”) della società in cui essa si svolge, mentre non gli riconosce nessun potenziale generativo, nessuna possibilità di cambiamento. Anzi, esplicitamente rifiuta le posizioni di quanti hanno evidenziato questa possibilità nelle loro ricerche, sostenendo che la sua analisi dei prodotti di consumo legati al mondo delle MMA vale più di tutte le analisi prodotte sin qui “da parte di sociologi o altri tipi di fighter estemporanei” (29): in questo, a mio parere, estende alla metodologia etnografica tutta una critica che può essere sensatamente mossa a un gruppo ben circoscrivibile di ricercatori che ne hanno fatto un uso discutibile, aderendo in maniera forse eccessivamente pedissequa al progetto di una “sociologia carnale” proposto da Wacquant nel suo studio seminale su una palestra di boxe nel ghetto di Chicago. Ritenendo che il metodo euristico più efficace per comprendere le “disposizioni” e gli “*habitus*” incorporati dai praticanti di discipline di combattimento sia vivere sulla propria pelle quello che essi vivono nella loro quotidianità, gli analisti che Dal Lago critica hanno scelto di indossare kimoni o guantoni per dedicarsi in prima persona alle attività oggetto di studio. Come fa notare correttamente l'autore, “L'elaborazione soggettiva della propria esperienza ha senso in psicologia e letteratura, ma ne ha molto meno nell'analisi di ciò che Goffman ha chiamato i ‘momenti’ della vita sociale” (29). A prescindere dal fatto che molti dei ricercatori che si sono occupati di sport hanno messo in luce i tanti altri aspetti per cui può essere euristico dedicarsi (per guadagnare la fiducia dei praticanti, per esempio, che non parlano volentieri con quelli che ritengono essere i “rappresentanti della società ‘perbene’, ovvero quella che considera la boxe come uno sport violento e disumano”: Scandurra, 2017, p. 17), il punto qui è che la critica di Dal Lago può essere mossa a un certo modo di fare etnografia, e non alla metodologia in sé, come egli invece sembra fare: “La famosa ‘osservazione partecipante’ i cui metodi vengono impartiti ai giovani ricercatori di scienze sociali da diversi decenni, ha e deve avere dei limiti. Dopotutto, non è mai stato necessario partecipare a un festino a base di carne umana per studiare il cannibalismo, né arruolarsi in una *crew* di rapinatori per essere sociologi del crimine” (28).

Tutto origina, mi pare, da un fraintendimento sui fondamenti della metodologia etnografica in cui incappano sia Dal Lago che i “sociologi e fighter dilettanti” che secondo lui poco hanno aggiunto alla comprensione del fenomeno: “partecipare”, in etnografia, non significa infatti svolgere le stesse attività che svolgono gli altri per poterle vivere, e dunque comprendere, sulla nostra pelle (teoricamente informata) di ricercatori. Significa piuttosto – che è ben diverso – cercare di capire come quelle attività vengono vissute e comprese dagli *altri*, partendo dal presupposto (imprescindibile per una disciplina che si occupa della *diversità* culturale) che la loro esperienza non necessariamente coincide con la nostra. Come ha chiarito uno degli studiosi di riferimento della disciplina (anche per quanti si siano dedicati, dopo il suo studio sul combattimento di galli a Bali, all'analisi delle pratiche fisiche e sportive), “l'etnografo non percepisce – e secondo me in buona misura non può percepire – quello che percepiscono i suoi informatori” (Geertz 2001, p. 74); perché i soggetti di cui si occupa l'antropologia sono soggetti

(e conoscenze, e saperi, e valori, e credenze, e tecniche...) “situati” in contesti sociali e culturali specifici, che difficilmente corrispondono a un soggetto universale o astratto (il “fighter”), intrappolato nella cultura in cui si muove, e dunque intercambiabile con qualsiasi altro soggetto che faccia parte di quella “cultura” sportiva (il “sociologo e fighter dilettante” di cui sopra) – e di conseguenza identificabile a partire da un’analisi “strutturale” della parte “spettacolare-mediale” del “fenomeno sportivo” (29) delle MMA professionistiche.

Quando dice “Mi sembra che, oltre alla visione dei filmati dei combattimenti, gli abbondanti materiali forniti dai professionisti (autobiografie, interviste, post su siti e social ecc.) siano più utili alla comprensione delle MMA che le elaborazioni delle proprie esperienze da parte di sociologi o altri tipi di fighter estemporanei” (29), Dal Lago cade nella stessa trappola in cui sono caduti i fighter estemporanei ai quali muove le sue critiche: non considerare cioè che in etnografia la partecipazione (corporea o meno) del ricercatore non dev’essere un fine, ma può essere uno strumento nel processo di produzione della conoscenza, perché questo processo verte sulla *relazione*, oltre che su una intima speculazione. Per una disciplina il cui oggetto è la differenza culturale, ha poco senso concentrarsi su ciò che accade al ricercatore quando vive esperienze per lui nuove, dal momento che il suo compito è quello di comprendere come gli altri vivano esperienze per loro familiari, e quale rilevanza sociale e culturale simili esperienze abbiano nei contesti in cui quelle persone si muovono (Nardini, 2022). “Partecipare”, in antropologia, significa *produrre* i dati etnografici sul campo, in una imprescindibile relazione con gli interlocutori con cui collaboriamo, anziché *raccogliarli* (Satta, 2007, p. 10), come farebbe appunto un semiologo, o uno scienziato della comunicazione.

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**Fanoli, F. (2022). Arene di Lotta. Corpi, mascolinità e invisibile nel làmb a Dakar.
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Gli studi su sport e mascolinità (Gottzén, 2016; Messerschmidt, 1993; Messner, 1997) hanno spesso evidenziato come il campo sportivo rappresenti un luogo di riproduzione di modelli di genere, tanto dal punto di vista discorsivo, quanto da quello performativo. Sotto il primo profilo, lo stesso linguaggio dello sport, soprattutto di quello organizzato e professionistico, ricorre a un frasario tipicamente maschilizzato, spesso, riferito a metafore di carattere militare o nazionalista; sotto il secondo profilo, lo sport è uno degli ambiti in cui, attraverso il corpo, elemento centrale nella pratica sportiva, la sua estetica, il suo posizionamento, la sua gestualità, si avvera la mascolinità, costruendone e mostrandone i modelli. Questo, sottolinea Kimmel (2006, p. 246), dipende dal fatto che lo sport:

abbraccia tutte e tre le strategie che gli uomini hanno storicamente utilizzato per dimostrare la propria virilità...lo sport costruisce il corpo; richiede forza, capacità, grandezza e resistenza – e autocontrollo. È anche...una riserva completamente maschile, che esclude gli 'altri' femminilizzati dai suoi campi sacri.

Lo sport, in particolare quello di squadra, è, dunque, un luogo privilegiato del maschile, di riaffermazione di forme idealizzate della mascolinità egemoni e globali (Connell, 1995; Messner, 1992; Kimmel, 2006), ipermaschili (Giulianotti, 1999; Spaaij, 2009), esclusive (Wellard, 2002), tossiche (Bliss, 1995), dicotomiche rispetto al femminile e all'omosessualità, riprodotte attraverso forme di socializzazione alla violenza fisica, al sessismo, all'aggressione e la valorizzazione del sacrificio, dell'obbedienza all'autorità e dell'omofobia. Tenendo conto che, però, l'articolazione della mascolinità nello sport si lega ad altre categorie di differenziazione - razza, etnia, religione, disabilità, orientamento sessuale, classe sociale - inferendo con questioni nazionali e internazionali, con cambiamenti sociali e culturali, recenti analisi hanno proposto una variazione rispetto a tale prospettiva, considerando lo sport uno spazio possibile di decostruzione dei modelli egemonici e di proposta di nuove forme di mascolinità inclusiva, a fronte, anche, della crescente partecipazione delle donne alle competizioni internazionali e del cambiamento delle percezioni e dei linguaggi intorno all'omosessualità (Anderson, 2009). Tali approcci, spesso criticati perché specificamente riferiti a contesti animati da uomini giovani, bianchi e di classe media (e anglosassoni), permettono una riflessione più ampia sullo sport come spazio dialettico rispetto alle identità di genere, in cui sono rappresentate diverse identità e performatività, tanto egemoni, locali e globali, quanto subordinate, favorendo l'affermarsi fluido di modelli ibridi e ibridizzati, "emergenti", continuamente costruiti e decostruiti attraverso il loro stesso essere agiti e narrati (Inhorn, 2012).

L' "emergenza" e l'ibridità sono da considerarsi una cifra interpretativa delle biografie dei lottatori di làmb – la lotta con i pugni senegalese – raccolte nell'ampio lavoro antropologico di Francesco Fanoli, in cui l'esperienza dei corpi – anche quello dell'autore stesso – è centrale nella ricostruzione della storia, della società e della cultura del Senegal contemporaneo. Il làmb e l'articolazione della mascolinità attraverso di esso rappresentano nel lavoro non solo un oggetto di analisi, ma uno strumento analitico, una prospettiva che illumina ed interseca l'evoluzione storico-sociale della pratica sportiva, nell'incontro-scontro con lo sport moderno e il neo-liberismo; i processi socio-culturali che sottendono la costruzione della nazione indipendente, le dinamiche politiche e di potere, e le forme di legittimazione nazionali ed internazionali; l'articolazione di tradizione e modernità, di locale e globale, che influenzano la definizione di nuove e vecchie élite e la rielaborazione delle classi sociali; i fenomeni di urbanizzazione che corrono lungo il cleavage centro/periferia; l'influenza dei cambiamenti economici, sociali e culturali sulle aspettative, i ruoli e le performatività di genere. Il risultato di questa "etnografia di lungo periodo" è un "percorso interpretativo" che delinea "le arene di làmb come un campo di lotte che vanno ben al di là dello scontro tra lottatori", come spazio politico "in cui si addensano poste in gioco di differente provenienza e sedimentazione storica" (p. 41). Un panorama, dunque, eterogeneo, che se rende – come sottolinea l'autore – improduttivo ogni tentativo di "definizione univoca dell'oggetto d'analisi", evidenzia le declinazioni del maschile nello sport come elemento centrale ai processi di soggettivazione nell'epoca neo-liberista e alle "disgiunzioni e gli intrecci tra esperienze corporee e discorsi dell'invisibile in Africa e altrove" (p. 45).

Quella in cui si pratica il làmb è, dunque, l'arena in cui si esprimono mascolinità emergenti – in particolare quelle dei giovani di estrazione popolare nelle periferie di Dakar – confrontandosi con la possibilità di una affermazione individuale, a fronte della mancanza di strutture di mobilità sociale, una possibilità che incrocia immaginari e aspettative che spesso trovano un possibile canale di realizzazione solo nella cultura della migrazione. È qui che va inquadrata l'enfasi che la pratica del làmb pone sull'adozione per i lottatori di uno stile di vita specifico "il divieto di assumere alcool e droga e di essere coinvolti in risse; il rispetto delle direttive degli allenatori e la serietà durante gli allenamenti; la disciplina quotidiana – vale a dire evitare di mangiare cibo acquistato per strada, limitare i rapporti sessuali e la vita notturna" (p. 35) – legato in modo diretto alla dimensione mistico-religiosa. Un *hygiène de vie* che informa il registro sportivo e quello religioso e permette una riaffermazione delle appartenenze, anche di genere, a fronte della precarietà e la fragilità che le attraversano nell'epoca contemporanea: il corpo, la sua estetica, la sua performatività comportamentale agiscono l'identità (Butler, 1990), la rendono immediatamente riconoscibile nello spazio sociale di riferimento. Nel caso del làmb l'azione del sé si dipana in uno spazio sportivo (e religioso considerando le specificità delle *confréries* in Senegal) in cui è centrale, come nel pugilato di Wacquant (2002), l'elemento della mimesi. Il làmb, per quanto prevalentemente individuale, è, infatti, una performance che dipende dalla collettività, perché è nella ripetizione del movimento, nella riproduzione mimetica dei gesti del maestro o degli altri lottatori che avviene la corretta incorporazione. A fronte di questo "apprendimento corporeo silenzioso" (p. 26) si rielaborano e si diffondono modelli di maschilità, favorendo l'identificazione in storie personali e sociali, non solo tra chi vive direttamente la lotta, ma anche tra chi la osserva. La dimensione collettiva – spesso comunitaria – è, qui, particolarmente rilevante, come lo è in altri contesti di precarietà e marginalità esistenziale e sociale: il lottatore si afferma a fronte di un

gruppo, che lo alimenta, lo definisce e rispetto al quale si definisce, lo sostiene, e ne alimenta l'espressione individuale nello spazio sociale. Uno spazio – quello sportivo – in cui è possibile affermarsi perché il talento atletico e le capacità possono agire come fonti alternative di riconoscimento sociale, in cui onore, dominio e amicizia possono essere esperienziati, modelli e soggettività di genere possono essere risignificati (Müller e Muntz, 2019).

Il lām̄b costituisce, dunque, un terreno di confronto tra persone e istanze eterogenee, espressioni delle diverse anime del paese, spesso con valori non conciliabili, che si riproduce attraverso frizioni continue tra realtà e possibilità, tra istanze neo-liberiste e intimità culturali (p.86), tra individuale e collettivo, in cui le soggettività (di genere) cercano (trovano?) un canale di posizionamento in spazi “stressanti e totalizzanti, solcati da insicurezze e ingiustizie, producendo uno strano miscuglio tra passione e disillusione, speranza e sconforto” (p. 232). A queste soggettività, dentro e fuori l'arena del lām̄b, alla ricerca di auto ed etero-riconoscimento (Honneth, 1996) a fronte dei cambiamenti globali nell'epoca del neo-liberismo, al personale e al corpo come campo politico, le conclusioni sono un omaggio.

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