

Gary Armstrong and Jon F Mitchell, *Global and Local Football. Politics and Europeanization on the fringes of the EU*, Routledge, 2008, 212 pages, indexed. ISBN 10:0-41-35017-4 (hbk) 10-203-60748-1 (ebk)

This book, focusing on one of international football's minnows, Malta, is intended to provide a case study concerning the dialectic of the local and the global within the context of the politics of European and world football. The authors stir up football memories, for people of my age, against the backdrop of important political events occurring in a country which has just joined the European Union. It draws heavily on the work of Carmel Baldacchino, rightly regarded by the authors as Malta's "foremost football historian."

The book covers a lot of ground and revises memories of great events in the annals of Maltese football history such as the 1971 European Championship (henceforth EC) match at the old *Empire Stadium* between Malta and the then recently deposed World Champions, England. England's meager win, through a fortuitous Martin Peters' goal, did nothing to detract from a rare piece of footballing bravado by a host of semi-professionals disdainfully dubbed 'a bunch of Spanish waiters' by an English First division manager who, together with other managers, refused to release star performers for the England team; they regarded this as a match England could win easily with five different formations. These managers also feared the risk of injury to their players on what used to be a hard-bone surface. The provocative statement coming from the English club manager, widely reported in the UK press, angered England's manager Sir Alf Ramsey, for the galvanizing effect it can have on the opponents. Certainly the chants of 'we are the champions, you are the bastards', referred to, by the authors, as a manifestation of nationalism during the Malta-England match, were re-echoed in a friendly played a few weeks later between the highflying Wolverhampton Wanderers and Maltese surprise title challengers Marsa also at the Empire Stadium. Marsa's equalizer around 15 minutes from time led to shouts of "bastards, bastards" which seemed to have infuriated the superior visiting team (Wolves were to reach the UEFA

Cup final a year later) to such an extent that they stepped up a few gears and rattled in four goals in the final period to condemn their hosts to a heavy defeat.

One other match which is given no reference, in this volume, despite space reserved for Victor Scerri's tenure as national team manager, is the prestigious goalless draw achieved by Malta against the might of West Germany, played in the same old Empire Stadium and on its infamous grassless pitch. West Germany went on to win that European Championship. Scerri also led Malta to a historic EC qualifying group win over Iceland at the now cast-aside *Stadio Celeste* in Messina owing to the fact that the *Empire Stadium* was suspended because of crowd trouble in a World Cup qualifying match involving Malta and Poland which was abandoned with the Poles leading 2-0. And yet, as the book so clearly illustrates, Scerri's name will forever be linked to one of the most dreadful nights in the Maltese national team's history, the 12-1 drubbing by Spain in Real Betis Seville's stadium which allowed the Spanish *selección* to pip Holland to the 1984 EC finals on goal average (Spain eventually made it to the final). Lots of questions were raised concerning that game which made Malta the laughing stock of Europe in sporting terms – suffice to mention that when I attend conferences or deliver a lecture in Spain I am often confronted, during the socialization periods, with references to 'el famoso partido Espana –Malta'. Armstrong and Miller point to a Macdonald clip used in Holland with regard to this match but fail to mention the more embarrassing Spanish clip, available on YouTube, in which the Maltese national team goalkeeper on the night features unabashedly as "el amigo perfecto" in a Spanish *Amstel* advert of recent years. Does this say anything about the dialectic of the global and the local with regard to Maltese football? Here is an aside which might be of interest to the authors and international readers of this journal: that same season 1983-84, Nottingham Forest, paid their second visit to Malta, this time minus manager Brian Clough, but containing the Dutch national team keeper, Hans Van Breukelen. It was rumoured that the former Utrecht goalie, who went on to win the European Cup with PSV and the E C with Holland, both in 1988, was reluctant to travel to Malta whose team obviously had left a bad taste

among the Dutch. However, travel he did, coming on as a centre forward in a May 1 (Workers' Day) exhibition match against Botev of Bulgaria at the Marsa Stadium. A couple of days later, he gave me an interview for the English language Maltese daily, *The Times*. I recall him having said that he regretted what happened not because the young Dutch team stood any chance of winning the tournament but because their young players with the names of –wait for them...Ruud Gullit, Ronald Koeman, Marco Van Basten, Frank Rijkaard Gerald Vannenburg, Wim Kieft etc....would have gained enough experience for them to do well the next time round. And indeed they did more than 'simply do well' in the subsequent tournament since, after emerging from the more difficult of the two groups in the finals, they went on to beat hosts and bitter rivals West Germany in their own den and the Soviet Union 2-0 in the final to lift the trophy. By then those players were among the most prized assets in European and world football.

Moving back from the global to the local, the international readers are provided with a series of intriguing and thankfully not 'exoticised' accounts of the different features of 'football made in Malta.' We read about the inevitable tales of corruption which, despite most people in Malta acknowledging this as an unsavoury feature of the game on this island, once led to a heated reaction to comments to this effect made in the Scottish press by a former Glasgow Rangers stalwart who managed Hamrun Spartans. The reaction on TV by one pundit reminded me of those reserved for Brian Glanville for his revelations, with Keith Bothsford, regarding Italian club sides in Europe in a *Sunday Times* spread titled the 'Golden Years of the Fix.' We also read about the 'big men' of Maltese football with some interesting statements made by some of the most colourful characters involved in the Maltese game. The bluntness of some of their statements would have earned them regular places on Aldo Biscardi's *Processo* programmes, had these men been involved in 'top flight' Italian football instead. There are also references to the Maltese favourite *xalatas* (merry making) for festas and football victories in the various competitions and the mocking of these teams' vanquished opponents. I am not so sure, however, of the validity of the term 'tmieghek' here. 'Tmieghku bihom' means 'outplayed them' and

this would mean a 3 or 4-0 romp and possibly also a comprehensive 2-0 win in which the victors outclassed their opponents. It has nothing to do with immediate post match bragging rights as the victors travel though the main thoroughfare of the vanquished team's home town. There are parallels here with the summer waterpolo championship on which the authors could have drawn.

The relationship between social class and football rivalry, typical of many countries, is underscored. In my view, however, the discussions here lack depth. This issue, of immense sociological interest, requires a more systematic exposition. The same applies to the wider issue of 'politics and football,' though other Mediterranean countries, such as Cyprus with its Right and Left, the latter in the form of *Akel*, the Communist Party, not to mention the link between clubs and refugee status (e.g. the highly successful Anorthosis from Famagusta who have been quite visible and successful on the European stage), would provide a much more interesting context. Yet the contrast between the more 'nationalist' Sliema Wanderers, most notably also because of their Presidents, the recently deceased George Bonello Depuis (rightly credited with having asked Colonel Gaddafi for help in sponsoring a new national stadium during the opening of the Libyan Cultural Institute in Valletta in 1974) and Robert Arrigo, and the 'labour' oriented Hibernians, the latter linked to the important Maltese political figure that was the late Lorry Sant, is very apt. I thoroughly enjoyed the section on Maltese supporters of foreign clubs which underlines the overall preference for foreign over Maltese football.

Despite all this, I found the book rather disappointing with regard to its theorisation of points emerging from the case study. Too many facts, not all correct, were thrown in without any broader conceptualization. In fact, I found this book to be largely under-theorised. The confrontation between the more 'populist' Joe Mifsud from Qrendi, an embodiment of the 'glocal,' who serves as MFA President and member of the UEFA Executive committee, and his suave and professionally dressed rival and former friend, Norman Darmanin Demajo, himself a distinguished accountant and former Valetta

soccer player, are interesting but should not have constituted the epilogue of the book. I would have expected such an epilogue to be a theoretical piece providing some enlightening rumination on the facts presented earlier. I was left with this basic question: what theoretical point is being made to render this case study of interest to the non Maltese reader? As for the Maltese reader, these accounts refresh our memories, in my case my memories of having been a young football aficionado and later a soccer reporter and writer for Maltese newspapers. And of course, as a Maltese reader, I could not resist a few chuckles at some of the howlers present in the text. The biggest one in my view is that of Terenzio Polverini (who held tenure as Malta national team coach with his main achievement being a 2-0 home win, again in a EC qualifying group, against a Greek national side comprising the cream of the 1971 Panathinaikos European Cup final team—Antoniadis, Kapsis –father of the one who won the EC in 2004—the much heralded schemer, Domazos etc.) as having been first engaged as coach of Gzira United by its “President” Jo Jo Mifsud Bonnici. Wrong! Mifsud Bonnici was at the time President of the MFA and not Gzira United. As the authors confirm later, his initial involvement with the MFA was that of representative of St George’s from his home town Bormla. Polverini is presented as a former manager of Serie B side Reggina. As far as I can recall, from an interview I carried out with him in 1975 for a defunct newspaper, *Mediterranean News*, he claimed that he was involved with the coaching staff of Ternana then managed by Viciani who led them to promotion to Serie A. I do not recall any mention of his having been involved with the Reggio Calabria side. As for Chief Justice Emeritus, Giuseppe Mifsud Bonnici, more could have been made of the fact that, despite being a fan of Italian soccer, he was a member of the UEFA disciplinary committee which had annulled Borussia Moenchengladbach’s 7-1 win over Inter, in a European cup match, because of an alleged bottle throwing incident involving Roberto Boninsegna. More could also have been made of the fact that Norman Darmanin Demajo was the UEFA delegate at the infamous 2000 UEFA Cup semifinal between Galatasaray and Leeds Utd which was preceded by stabbing incidents at Taksim Square, in the Marmara area of Istanbul, resulting in the death

of two Leeds' supporters. In Pierce Dudgeon's biography of Malta's thinking guru, Edward DeBono, Norman Darmanin Demajo describes the way he went about his task, using Lateral Thinking. I mention these two as interesting episodes involving Maltese officials acting prominently in European football decision making processes and therefore providing some further evidence of the interaction between the global and the local.

Other howlers, indicating a certain degree of sloppiness, include that of Malta having become a Republic in 1973 (!!) when the actual year was 1974. There is also the wrong translation of *Zeppi l-hafi* (written Zeppi l-Hefi) as 'Joseph the bully' when *hafi* stands for barefoot. Then we have the location of the Mile End grounds being at Marsa which is close enough to the actual location but then everything is close enough in a micro-state. The truth is that, as any Maltese will tell you, the Mile End is at *Blata l-Bajda*, a suburb of Hamrun, the area which now houses both the Malta Labour Party HQs and Hamrun Spartans' Victor Tedesco Stadium. The current President of the Republic, himself a former sportsman who represented the University of Malta internationally at table-tennis, besides having served as President of Qormi FC and the MFA, was never a member of parliament.

Finally there are references to politically motivated shootings and killings during the Mintoff years. There were two major political killings during this period, that of the young Karen Grech during the doctor's strike and that of Raymond Caruana on the eve of the 1987 Elections. These are indeed tragic events but the authors' statement "crude incendiary bombs killed opponents from both sides of the political spectrum" gives one the false impression that the death toll was larger, reminiscent of an Indian electoral campaign.