

## BOOK REVIEW

**Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, PublicAffairs, New York, 206 pp.**

Joseph Nye, an influential theorist in international relations, introduces in his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004) the concept of „soft power“, a term that has become essential in analyzing global power. Unlike „hard power“, which relies on military and economic force, „soft power“ refers to a state's ability to achieve its objectives through attraction and cultural, political, and diplomatic influence. His work was crucial for understanding how countries exercise their influence in an increasingly interconnected world.

This book is particularly significant for both international relations theory and the analysis of contemporary issues such as sports diplomacy, the impact of media platforms, and the geopolitical strategies of major powers. In the following sections, we will examine the book's key ideas, its theoretical contributions, and the practical implications of the concept of soft power. Nye argues that in the modern world, a nation's success is no longer solely dependent on its military or economic strength. Instead, a country's ability to shape others' preferences through culture, political ideas, and effective foreign policies is becoming increasingly important.

The book is structured into several chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of soft power: the author examines the definition and nature of power through the distinction between hard power, which includes military and economic force, and soft power, which is based on cultural influence, values, and diplomacy, highlighting that these two types of power are not opposed but complementary. Soft power sources include culture, political values, and foreign policy, the main mechanisms through which a state can exercise non-coercive influence.

The role of culture in global influence is essential, with examples such as Hollywood films and prestigious universities that transform American culture into one of the most powerful instruments of soft power. Foreign policy and international perception play a crucial role in consolidating a state's influence, as foreign policies perceived as legitimate attract international support. The way a state projects its image on the global stage directly affects its level of acceptance and its ability to cooperate internationally. States and the power of narrative are analyzed through the communication strategies and discourses nations employ to shape their global image, influencing external perceptions and strengthening their position in international relations.

Nye makes a fundamental contribution to international relations theory by introducing the concept of soft power. While classical realism emphasizes hard power, Nye argues that non-coercive power plays an essential role in the post-Cold War world.

The book's relevance is evident in its analysis of the behavior of major powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia, each utilizing soft power in distinct ways to enhance their global influence. The United States dominates in this area through popular culture, democratic values, and media influence, with global brands like Apple, Google, and Netflix providing clear examples of American cultural impact. China has invested heavily in soft power through initiatives such as the Confucius Institute, the Belt and Road strategy, and the promotion of its culture internationally, aiming to extend its influence through a combination of economic development and cultural exchange. Russia, although primarily relying on hard power, also uses soft power tools, such as media propaganda through RT (Russia Today), to project its image and influence public opinion in other countries.

This theory is also highly relevant in analyzing sports diplomacy, with a clear example being the use of international sporting events, such as the Olympics or Formula 1, as tools to project a positive image of a state. This demonstrates that sport can function as an extension of a non-coercive influence strategy.

Although the concept of soft power is extremely useful, Nye's book is not without criticism, as it presents certain theoretical and practical limits. One of the main critiques concerns the lack of a clear methodology, as Nye provides numerous examples of how soft power works but does not propose a concrete analytical framework for measuring it, making it difficult to quantify cultural or political influence in practice. Some critics also argue that Nye overestimates the role of soft power and underestimates the impact of hard power, as military and economic strength remain essential in maintaining global influence, particularly in contexts of security and geopolitical competition. Another important limitation is the reliance on public perception, as soft power only works if the external audience is receptive to the values and messages conveyed, and in some cases, such as the promotion of democracy by the United States, there is a high level of skepticism from certain states that view these initiatives as unwelcome external interventions.

Despite these criticisms, the book remains an essential read for anyone studying international relations or global communication, offering a critical framework for understanding the dynamics of non-coercive power and how states can build their influence in an interconnected world.

*Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* is a crucial book for understanding how states exert influence on the international stage. Nye shows that in the era of globalization, power is now measured not only by military strength and GDP but also by a nation's capability to inspire, persuade, and attract other international actors. In today's world, where digital technology plays a crucial role in disseminating information, soft power becomes even more important. Strategies such as utilizing social media, leveraging the influence of global universities, or organizing international events are all examples of how states attempt to extend their influence without resorting to force.

Joseph Nye's book offers an excellent analytical framework for understanding power in the 21st century, particularly for those interested in international relations, diplomacy, and geopolitics.

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**Paolo Berizzi, *Il ritorno della Bestia. Come questo governo ha risvegliato il peggio dell'Italia*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2024, pp.113**

The rise of neofascist movements, the resurgence of fascist symbols and ideologies, and the establishment of authoritarian and illiberal governments in Europe and the United States have become significant topics of academic research in recent years. Since the postwar period, Italian leftist intellectuals have often pointed out the ongoing presence of fascist elements within the democratic framework that emerged after World War II. A notable example of this is Umberto Eco's observation in 2018, which references his 1995 lecture titled "Ur-Fascism" (also known as The Eternal Fascism), an essay warning about recurring authoritarian patterns in contemporary society.

The experience of the Second World War has given rise to two closely intertwined myths in contemporary Italian political discourse: the "bad German" and the "good Italian." While the validity of these myths can be questioned, they have become widely disseminated and largely accepted by public opinion in Italy. Moreover, politicians and diplomats have leveraged these narratives, believing that emphasizing Germany's significant responsibilities in the war, alongside recognizing the contributions of the Italian Resistance between 1943 and 1945 in aiding the Allied effort to liberate the peninsula, would help restore Italy's international role as a regional middle power and facilitate its full reintegration into the global arena.

Italy has not fully confronted its fascist past, failing to engage in the challenging yet essential process of addressing the responsibilities that stem from a twenty-year dictatorship and twenty months of brutal civil war. As a result, "benign" reinterpretations of Mussolini and his regime periodically emerge. This absence of confrontation explains why elements of fascism persist in Italian society.

In Paolo Berizzi's latest book, "The Return of the Beast," the theme of historical legacy is thoroughly examined, particularly in the context of recent developments in Italy. The book emphasizes how the legacies of historical fascism continue to influence contemporary political structures and ideologies. It highlights the persistence of neofascist sentiments within mainstream Italian politics, particularly within the dominant party, Fratelli d'Italia. Under Giorgia Meloni's government, these dynamics have gained new visibility as her party navigates the tension between presenting a modern, respectable image and its historical connections to fascist and neofascist traditions. The analysis emphasizes that, while the current administration operates within democratic institutions, it often avoids taking a clear antifascist stance, rejecting the break with fascism that Gianfranco Fini, then president of Alleanza Nazionale, declared in Fiuggi in 1995. This reflects an unresolved ambivalence toward Italy's authoritarian past and the ongoing influence of nostalgic and neo-authoritarian currents in shaping policy, rhetoric, and political culture.

Paolo Berizzi warns that, in today's complex Italian national context, it is crucial to comprehend how rapidly what Senator for Life Liliana Segre has described as a "sea of intolerance"

is developing. He argues that the escalating normalization of fascist sentiments in common thought is fueled by a political climate that capitalizes on fear. By examining the period from 2019 to 2024, the author identifies recurring themes and significant events that highlight a concerning rise in intolerance. Intolerance and hatred in all their forms—whether verbal or otherwise—are on the rise. This includes verbal violence, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, discrimination, and a troubling resurgence of antisemitism. This book focuses particularly on the alarming increase in instances where fascism and neo-fascism are prominent in statements, social media posts, deliberate misstatements, writings glorifying fascist and Nazi “heroes,” provocations, and attacks. Often, the individuals behind these actions are political figures from the sovereignist and “neo-patriotic” right, specifically from the Giorgia Meloni party and government. Their cynical propaganda has played a significant role in awakening a latent fascist sentiment within the nation.

Berizzi performs a detailed analysis of political discourse, closely monitoring public statements, social media activities, and other actions by politicians that promote or legitimize fascism.

The book argues how fascism has resurfaced through hostility toward foreigners and minorities, along with a concerning normalization of indifference. A significant factor is the lack of institutional responses to nostalgic commemorations of fascism, which are becoming increasingly accepted in public discourse. Italy's struggle to fully acknowledge and internalize the guilt associated with fascism is a significant issue linked to its twentieth-century history. Unlike Germany, where even those born after World War II feel a sense of responsibility for Nazism and the Holocaust, recognizing its impact without needing to inquire about their relatives' experiences, Italy has largely suppressed its own guilt. This situation contributes to what is often referred to as the Italian anomaly: it is the only European democracy where the ideological descendants of fascism, having transitioned through the “taxi” of the Italian Social Movement (MSI), are currently in power.

For fifty years, the MSI played a significant role in Italian politics, being represented in Parliament and even influential in the election of two presidents of the Republic. Nevertheless, the party remained tied to neofascist violence, directly or indirectly involved in street clashes and dramatic episodes such as the “Black Thursday” in Milan in 1973. The formula “neither renounce nor restore,” attributed to De Marsanich, defined its ambivalent position: neither seeking to reinstate fascism nor condemning it. This attitude explains the persistence of neofascist nostalgia, which the current Fratelli d'Italia also seems to perpetuate, often refusing to distance itself from that past. The *Svolta di Fiuggi* of 1995 marked an attempt at rupture through Alleanza Nazionale and its leader, Gianfranco Fini, who condemned fascism as the “absolute evil” and reaffirmed the duty of a modern right to declare itself antifascist. However, the differences in stance between that line and Giorgia Meloni's demonstrate that the issue remains crucial in Italian politics.

Brezzi demonstrated that fascism in Italy has never completely faded away. Although it was defeated on the battlefield, it was not eradicated from the cultural landscape. Instead, it lingers beneath the surface of national life, often normalized and unrecognized, manifesting as a form of everyday behavior and popularized authoritarian attitudes. Contemporary fascism is not a single, clearly defined phenomenon; rather, it is a hybrid that includes post-fascist, neo-fascist, crypto-fascist, and populist elements. This ideology goes beyond the political parties that helped bring it back; it has become a wider cultural and political attitude in society. Today, we are not encountering a form of fascism that resembles historical examples, but rather a fragmented and adaptable phenomenon that frequently remains hidden, even as it becomes more visible in public life. The resurgence of authoritarian impulses gives it greater visibility and power. Its rhetoric targets a widening array of perceived enemies, including immigrants and foreigners, undocumented migrants, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that support these groups, the political left, antifascists, the LGBTQ+ community and its advocates, gender studies, and even intellectuals themselves.

This mixture of xenophobia, historical amnesia, and institutional lack of reaction or passivity creates a fertile ground for the re-emergence of authoritarian and fascist ideologies. This authoritarianism often disguises itself behind a facade of patriotism, mixing nationalism, xenophobia, resentment, and pettiness. The resulting society is exclusionary from the outset, rooted in the notion of a “natural” community defined by blood and soil, closed off and centered around a totalizing leader. People who are suffering, fearful, and insecure are inclined to surrender to such a leader, who presents himself as one of the people, embodying their traits rather than genuinely representing their collective interests.

Berizzi’s book serves as an important warning, illustrating that while historical fascism belongs to the past, its modern manifestations, rooted in political discourse, social attitudes, and institutional inaction, continue to pose a significant threat. This perspective aligns with Primo Levi’s insight that fascism is not limited to a particular historical period; it can resurface in new forms whenever the concentration of power undermines citizens’ freedoms and their ability to think and act independently.

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**James Ferguson, *Global Shadows, Africa In The Neoliberal World Order*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2006, 268 pp.**

Debates about Africa's place in the global economy have often been shaped by postcolonial and development perspectives, which highlight how historical legacies and global power structures produce relative development and economic inclusion. In *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*, published by Duke University Press (Durham and London) in 2006, anthropologist, author, and Stanford Professor James Ferguson challenges these assumptions. At the core of Ferguson's intervention lies the argument that Africa is not excluded from the process of globalisation within the neoliberal global order, but rather incorporated in selective and deeply unequal ways.

The book comprises eight essay-chapters (some previously published) on topics ranging from global inequality and modernisation to cultural phenomena, social injustice, and transnational dynamics. While these essays do not make up a singular, unique argument, they converge in the themes explored and in their contribution to the reconfiguration of how Africa in its entirety could be understood. The prevailing analytical point reframes Africa's position in the global order through the lens of uneven and fragmented inclusion. Ferguson then supports his argument with unique case-studies and examples.

The first half of the book is more focused on questions of globalisation, independence, political thought, and ideology in the African view and transnational power inputs. Ferguson argues that the process of globalisation is not defined by a 'flow' of capital, as the phenomenon is often described, but rather a fragmented capital movement, which 'hops' between places, leaving the in-between areas uncovered - the argument of discontinued globalised inclusion. This view in the first chapter represents the analytical ground for the book and is crucial for understanding the later analysis of the role of external actors in socio-political and economic interactions within a national framework. The analysis standpoint challenges the idea of a pyramidal or state-centered power configuration. Exploitation, capital movement, ruling, and resistance alike are presented by the author as phenomena operating through dispersed networks rather than a clear vertical hierarchy. Additionally, the essays examine concepts such as independence and socialism and contrast Western views with African perceptions and realities. Where independence proves political and economic viability in the occidental vision, this political stance appears largely symbolic in the contemporary life of ordinary Africans, as the author proves. This exploration of a ubiquitous term - independence -

comes to prove how statehood in the Global South is defined in relation to the Global North, instead of to standalone national feasibility. African thought and perception are then oriented towards political thinking, Ferguson instead discussing important themes of morality in views on socialism. The anthropologist identifies that the African moralising and deeply humanising voice takes over concepts such as capitalism, market economy, and governance, and creates a unique variation of political practices, aligned with cultural philosophies of life.

In the second half of the book, a predominant theme relates culture, mimesis, and cultural equality and modernity, only for the author to return to economic and security order in the last chapter. Ferguson expands the notion of cultural difference into the unsettling realms of material inequality and the desire for likeness or 'copying'. The apparent mimesis of African cultural practices is recontextualised through the humorously written pages of a Zambian magazine, as well as through a striking letter written by two Guinean boys, in the name of - collectively - the African children. Through this cultural exploration, the author engages with local debates on national identity, internalised colonial archetypes and Western values. However, Ferguson also invites an empathetic reading, and calls for the reader to exit ethnographic analysis in interacting with the texts, and form their perception sensibly. The last two chapters seek to deconstruct and pluralise the notion of modernity in ways unusual and unique for anthropological practice, and to cover political, social, environmental and economic realities caused by the extractive industry, addressing themes such as corruption, security, war and development.

When it comes to the book's placement in academic conversation, the author employs an undeniably wide range of academic texts and sources to build the arguments, without which the book's broad thematic nature would not have been possible. Ferguson's analysis resonates with broader traditions in dependency theory, development, and postcolonial studies, even if it does not explicitly align itself with a single theoretical framework.

The volume's primary limitation stems from the complexity of its purpose - to cover the entirety of the African continent and drive attention to its "place-in-the-world" - which poses issues stemming from the region's heterogeneity. While the volume's intention to address the continent in its entirety could be analytically productive, it simultaneously risks flattening or dismissing regional differences. This raises the issue of theorising large-scale inequalities at a macro level without unintentionally reproducing the very generalisations such analysis seeks to critique. Additionally, because the book is structured as a collection of essays, the analytical focus shifts frequently, which

can make the arguments appear abstract, and some of them would have benefited from a deeper development. Despite this, Ferguson's work manages to cover important themes in African development and represents an important conceptual contribution to debates on Africa and globalisation.

Provided that the book uses accessible language for its theoretical complexity, employing humour and informal speech to explain vast ideas, I would recommend it not just to students or scholars, but to curious ordinary readers alike. From historical realities, to cultural practices and thought, the most important areas of African socio-political life are broadly covered. Through its enduring relevance, the book provides a valuable overview and useful knowledge in interpreting contemporary relations within and between states, and ways in which colonialism continues to accentuate disparities, in the absence of true accountability from the Western world. From this point of view, the book invites (Western) readers to reconsider dominant narratives on African marginality. In this sense, the volume contributes to academic debates on development and globalization and invites a critical re-evaluation of the moral and historical responsibilities in global inequalities. To quote Ferguson, 'It remains for us in the West — as we survey the carnage left in the wake of colonization, Cold War, and the forced march of "development"— to ask an equally profound moral question [...]: "My God, what have we done?"'

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**Noam Chomsky, *Iugoslavia. Pace, război și disoluție*, Editura Litera, 2021, 272 pp.**

Noam Chomsky is an American author and leading critic of his country's military interventions in post-Cold War international relations. The volume "Yugoslavia, Peace, War and Dissolution" offers a revisionist perspective on the violent disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The book was written during the period often described as Pax Americana and as a reaction to the American doctrine of the "Responsibility to Protect". Chomsky claims that the Yugoslav space served as a testing ground for a new mode of Western military interventionism, at a time when NATO was seeking legitimacy in the new world order.

The central thesis of this book is that the dissolution of Yugoslavia was not an inevitable consequence of the ancestral hatreds of the nationalities that composed the Balkan state, but a process induced, shaped, and accelerated by the Western powers. Chomsky suggests that Yugoslavia, with its hybrid economic model and position as the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, represented an anomaly that had to be forcibly integrated into the new global system. His argument unfolds along four main lines: The undermining of the structural economy through the state's loans in the 1980s from the IMF and the World Bank, which led to a major economic crisis, which resulted in the growth of nationalist sentiment, leading directly to wars; Diplomatic Sabotage by the Western world, furthermore through premature recognition of secessionist republics, such as Slovenia and Croatia, without taking into account the Serbian minority in Croatian Krajina, was a first step towards violence; NATO and "Humanitarian Imperialism", most often observed in Kosovo, the author says that NATO did not intervene specifically to protect the Albanian minority, but the main goal was to increase NATO's credibility by intervening without a UN mandate; The concept of "Unworthy Victims", here he argues that while NATO protects some minorities such as Albanians in Kosovo and Muslims in Bosnia, they turn a blind eye to "Unworthy Victims", such as Serbs in Croatian Krajina and Kurds in Turkey.

The American author's analysis is systematic and based on the methodical deconstruction of media discourse, seeking to separate the root causes of the conflict from the "pretexts" presented to the public. A strong point of his analysis is the meticulous way in which he cites reports from the OSCE and other international observers, which sometimes contradict the NATO perspective.

The book is built on an exceptionally rich and thoroughly documented foundation. Chomsky adopts a method in which he quotes almost exclusively from Western sources to demonstrate that, even by their own standards, the interventions lacked a strong legal basis. Structurally, the volume is a compilation of texts that occasionally revisit similar arguments, which may feel repetitive. However, Chomsky's style is polemical, sharp, and analytical; the interviews include a note of clarity, translating his complex geostrategic concepts directly and facilitating understanding for those who are not specialists in Balkan history.

The fundamental value of this work lies in its function as a "moral compass of double standards". Chomsky forces the reader to confront the "hypocrisy" of the international system. This interrogation is one of the author's most important ethical contributions in the field of international relations. However, a significant weakness in his approach is his treatment of the Srebrenica massacre. Although the author condemns the crimes, he refuses to use the term genocide, which he considers a form of "politicized terminological inflation", which has been interpreted as minimizing the suffering of the victims of the massacre. This choice undermines Chomsky's credibility, suggesting he is more concerned with his anti-imperialist vision than with reality.

In conclusion, "Yugoslavia, Peace, War and Dissolution", written by Noam Chomsky, is a very valuable read for understanding the wars in the former Yugoslavia and the mechanics of global power. Even if Chomsky's vision sometimes seems to excuse the regime in Belgrade, the reason is simple, his opposition to Washington, the volume being essential for the development of a critical opinion. Its broader message is one of intellectual vigilance: in times of conflict, not only truth becomes a casualty, but also citizens' ability to discern the structural interests hidden behind humanitarian rhetoric.

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