

Book Reviews

F. Becker, *The Politics of Poverty: Policy-Making and Development in Rural Tanzania*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019, pp. 381.

This book by Felicitas Becker, which is divided into seven chapters plus conclusions, starts from a series of questions on the management of the development policies of Tanzania during its colonial history and after the achievement of national independence: the author is focused in particular on one of the poorest and least economically developed areas of the country located in the south-eastern part, which includes the regions of Mtwara and Lindi. Most of the questions – which the author could not avoid asking himself in the course of his field research, given the contradictions affecting the development policies of Tanzania – start from the assumption that the development of this country, using the words of Becker, continues to be a “persistent” and, at the same time, “evanescent” theme (p. 1). The impoverishment of Tanzania, caused by colonial domination, has been a recurring occurrence over time, even during the implementation of the most recent development programs. Indeed, one of the author’s questions brings to the fore the fact that the “rural poverty in this region appears both easy to explain and mystifying, whether judging by historical sources or by everyday conversation” (p. 1). Furthermore, a social reality is presented that now seems resigned to the conditions of poverty experienced for decades in the East African country, which is one of the poorest in the world. Through field studies in south-eastern Tanzania, Becker was able to verify that despite the ineffectiveness of numerous development projects, “ephemeral and unpopular for decades”, these remain current and feasible in the context of the country even today: in fact, the “stratagems then being tried in development projects were near-identical to the ones tried in the 1930s”, except that they were offered as new guidelines for economic enhancement policies (p. 1). Another exemplary question concerns the search for the reasons why a large part of the population preferred “hold their poverty against themselves” rather than improve their condition (p. 1). To explain the intent of the research that has been carried out, the author proposes the example of the conditions

of poverty of a local woman: the inhabitants of the area studied by Becker, if they are lucky enough to own or use the arable land, are obliged to choose whether to use the harvest to eat or to sell it to make money. Indeed, it is not possible to achieve both objectives because the cultivation can be exploited for self-sufficiency or for sale. Therefore, the author states that this condition “has been central to the constant recurrence of rural poverty here since the colonial period” (p. 2). In the case of the condition of south-east Tanzania it is interesting to discover that nothing has been done to try to improve the local situation: this area, indeed, “lacks reliable high-value cash crops, as well as transport links to affordably extract what cash crops there are” (p. 2). In this context, new profitable, higher-value crops, such as cotton, would have been useful, and fertilizers should have been used to improve the odds of higher yields. In addition, a road network that could support agricultural production was built only in 2009 and could only enhance the scarce crops implemented in Tanzania. The context that emerges from this research shows a population that, despite the daily difficulties and economic limitations, has learned to be satisfied with the little they have and try to make the most of it: in fact, “small-scale non-monetary exchanges” and support and assistance between neighbours thrive (p. 3).

This research, therefore, aims to answer a series of questions “about what was wrong” with the population of south-eastern Tanzania for being so poor through the study of “environmental constraints, administrative dynamics, and an economic and political context that [...] make this region’s failure to prosper throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first quite understandable” (p. 4). The author, however, is also interested in the analysis of the mentality of the people of south-east Tanzania, because it emerges that there is a severe self-critical spirit regarding the reasons that led to such severe poverty. The author focuses, in particular, on this problem: from research conducted in the field and in the archives of non-governmental organizations and through a series of interviews with witnesses in the south-east part of this East African country, as well as from the literature taken into consideration, it emerges that those who had to deal with the development of Tanzania encouraged the self-critical spirit of the people without dwelling on their own mistakes (p. 4). Regarding this, the author states that: “the peculiar rhetoric serves above all to manage potential political fallout from the fairly predictable lack of progress” (p. 5). The actions of the protagonists of development policies, therefore, have always been imbued with a “particular mixture of understanding and condemnation, of resigned pragmatism and self-flagellation, and of careful observation and formulaic advice”, which through a series

of unfulfilled promises has often induced the peoples of developing countries to have an optimistic vision of development policies (p. 5). The seven chapters, therefore, retrace the fundamental stages of the failed development policies implemented in south-east Tanzania and the effects on the territory and its population. Chapter 1 presents the literature consulted on the subject and considers the example of a famine that occurred in 1930 in the small rural district of Tunduru: through the story of the events and the political management of the famine, making use of interviews with officials and inhabitants of the region, the author tries to show the insecurity and inability of the ruling class to cope with this situation, observing the divergence between the speeches of the protagonists of the story. The management of the famine was strongly influenced by environmental, social, economic and political factors, so much so that the ruling class tried to justify their mistakes by modelling the official analyses and looking for the faults of the famine in the practices of the population who previously carried out servile tasks. In chapter 2 Becker shows the transformations that have characterized the environment, society and economy of Tanzania from the advent of colonialism until the 1930s, when, by virtue of a social transformation, the economy of the territory passed from a system based on the ownership and export of slaves to a "colonial cash crop economy" (p. 40). In this period, it is possible to appreciate more clearly the "social understanding of poverty" and the real economic skills of the villagers of Tanzania, who demonstrated broad entrepreneurial attitudes and developed a competitive mentality on the market (p. 40). The abilities of the population were, however, compromised by the lack of resources in their territory, characterized by scarce and irregular rains, low soil fertility and risks of loss of crops due to the raids of wild animals. Chapter 3 shows the consequences of the attempts of producers to insert Tanzania in the global market between the mid-1800s and the mid-1900s. The result of these policies was a wide conflict between local officials, who implemented technocratic approaches in the agricultural sector to increase production and to fight poverty, and the central government: this opposition gave rise to a political problem, relegating to the background all the projects for the development of agricultural production. Attempts by local authorities to improve the transport system and increase the quality of agricultural production with new crops were mortified by the political needs of the central government, which relied on Indian intermediaries insisting on the local economy's need to learn how the global market works. In chapter 4, the author demonstrates that the development policies implemented in south-east Tanzania have played an essentially political role in favour of the nationalist elites supported by the colonial

authorities. The insufficient result of the policies in creating the basis for a development of the Tanzanian economy led the political class to accuse the beneficiaries of the technologies of being unable to exploit the resources made available. Chapter 5 represents an analysis of the concept of villagization and its application to the case of south-east Tanzania: in this analysis villagization is not considered as a phenomenon of resistance of farmers to the interaction with the global market, but as a new form of rural economy, which could have a better chance of competing on the market. In chapter 6 Becker analyses the transformations in the society and in the economy of south-east Tanzania following the adoption of the policies of villagization: the author studies the new perspectives and the mostly unsuccessful attempts of the central government to diversify the economy of the territory seeking development outside agriculture. In chapter 7 the author analyses a local example, the small town of Kineng'ene near the city of Lindi, in which from the 1990s onwards small-scale interventions were initiated to combat the phenomenon of poverty. The example proposed clarifies the dynamics between state and society in a context in which the population asked for means and resources to get in touch with the markets and the ruling class demonstrated its inability to manage development in the provinces.

In conclusion, Becker's research tries to show – through a rather critical observation of the work of non-governmental organizations, local officials and the ruling class of Tanzania – the reasons that can explain the persistence of the condition of poverty for the people of the south-east part of the East African country: the author argues that at the local level the population has never been able to benefit from effective means to act against their situation (p. 281). On a broader level, however, Becker explains that “the inability of development intervention to address the Southeast's failure to prosper was due to a mismatch between the large-scale, systemic problems at play and the limited, ad-hoc solutions available” (p. 281). As a consequence of this, those who had to carry out the development programs had to explain the failures and therefore decided to shift their attention to the poor: indeed, according to the rhetoric of the ruling class, they were responsible for remaining poor and for failing to take advantage of the opportunities made available to improve their economic and social conditions. The problem of the south-east of Tanzania lies, however, in the environmental limits that make production insufficient, in the uncertainty of the markets and, above all, in an impossible collaboration between central government and local institutions: the latter, which are considered by the author as the only subjects interested in an improvement of the situation, had to face numerous economic, social and political obstacles

which jeopardized the actual implementation of development projects. The admission of the inability to solve these problems would, however, compromise the possibility of accessing further funding and, in an attempt to cloud the failures, a plausible culprit was sought. The consequence of all this is that the responsibility for the failure of development policies fell on the population, indicated as the subject who was unable to exploit the alleged possibilities made available for the development of the local economy.

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F. Dandolo, *Luigi Einaudi tra le due guerre. Questioni sociali e banche*, ABI Servizi-Bancaria Editrice, Roma 2022, pp. 320.

Francesco Dandolo's new book is the second work in the context of a broader research project promoted by the Luigi Einaudi Institute and ABI Servizi-Bancaria Editrice. Through this analysis, Dandolo intends to continue the analysis and enhancement of the major problems raised by Luigi Einaudi's thought. Among these themes, the value attributed by Einaudi to the "leagues" of entrepreneurs and the essential function they perform, together with the "leagues" of workers, to "facilitate the dialogue between the citizen and the State, within that dense network of intermediate organisms and bodies (the family, the electoral college, the school, the university, the scientific academy and the political party, as well as naturally the leagues of entrepreneurs and workers) which innervate a healthy society" (p. 7). Dandolo has explored the issues of economic associations and Einaudi's thought in liberal Italy in the previous volume.

In the second work of this series, the author focuses his attention on the analysis of social issues and banking associations, considering the period from 1919 to 1939. The two decades after the First World War were particularly important as Italy was devastated by the social struggles and the so-called "biennio rosso" (Red Biennium): these instabilities then resulted in the advent of the fascist regime, which had a profound effect, among others, precisely on the phenomenon of economic associations, which, consequently, was overwhelmed by the corporate State (p. 7). In the same period, the "issues of banking associations were organically and intimately intertwined with the more general evolution of the Italian credit system, which in those years was the subject of a series of [...] revolutionary changes" (p. 8).

The volume is divided into two parts, which correspond to the two