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The historical figure, thought, action and teachings of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi have been at the centre of countless studies and interpretations. Even his personality and morals have been scrutinised by scholars and thinkers of different disciplines, as to testify that the interest around the Mahatma went far beyond the central role he played over three decades in the struggle for Indian independence, or his adamantly relying on non-violent action as the guiding principle for political action. One of the elements that attracted much interest in and sparked many debates about Gandhi has been his unending search for a complete adherence between public action and private life: being a religious-moral conception of Truth at the basis for a righteous and legitimate political struggle, there could be no right claim against colonialism, no push towards social or political or economic change if one's own life was not aligned to those principles of truth and morality. Gandhi himself saw that this was necessarily to be recognised an ideal end, a source of inspiration and a watchdog to guide one's life and principles, while politics and collective action were more often than not subject to choices and more worldly compromise. However, throughout all his life he never abandoned the struggle to make his private life the epitome of his message and public action. In the thousands of written pages he left – including personal notes, letters, articles and public speeches – scholars have sought interpretations and meanings to give account, systematise or simply better understand his views towards life, politics and religiosity. Interestingly, the more one enters into the Mahatma's writings and the more one steps into contradictions, into statements that pointed towards one direction just to find that Gandhi himself countered them in other occasions. And, if he was very much aware of the inconsistencies in which he stepped, and even laid claim on them as Eijiro Hazama points out in his essay for this book, it has been the tendency of some scholars to try to over-systematise and essentialise his thought in order to derive a consistent explanation or theory about him. Such a tendency is very well avoided by the essays contained in this book, edited by Marzia Casolari as a follow up of a conference she convened at the University of Turin to commemorate the Mahatma's 150th birth anniversary.

The title of the book well reflects its purpose, as the editor also states in the introduction: echoing Ramchandra Guha's landmark trilogy (*India After Gandhi*, 2008; *Gandhi Before India*, 2013; and *The Years That Changed the World 1915-1948*, 2018), Casolari has conceived this book as to take distance from the majority of previous works on the Mahatma, inasmuch as it seeks to highlight aspects of Gandhi's

experience and legacy “and relate them to the challenges of the present”. With this aim in mind, the various contributors address well specific aspects of his politics and thought without delving into apologetic details of his biography, rather looking for possible understandings of the way in which his stands on specific issues were received and influenced his contemporaries as well as subsequent generations of thinkers and activists. In particular, the first and third sections of the book host contributions that look at Gandhi’s legacy and significance to other historical and geographical contexts, and in doing so allow the reader to critically reconsider aspects of his thought and action and their relevance to present times. Section two, instead, is historically focused on the figure of the Mahatma, proposing contributions that critically evaluate his role and impact in specific moments and contexts during his life. All in all, the book represents a useful compendium to understand less known and nonetheless important aspects pointing at the way in which Gandhi’s legacy directly resonates in the present.

In the first section, for instance, the essays by Corazza, Concilio and Carosso move around several interesting aspects that characterized the reception of the Mahatma as an exemplary figure and of non-violence as a guiding principle for political action outside India. Far from exalting Gandhi in hagiographical terms, the three contribution aim to show how activists and leaders who confronted with Gandhi’s thought had to confront also with ambiguities and limits, and the eventual acceptance of non-violence as a tool for action was not a blind leap of faith.

In Chiara Corazza’s and Carmen Concilio’s essays the focus is on Gandhi’s reception in the context of South African anti-apartheid struggle and Pan-Africanism. Both highlight the wide reception and the ambivalent influence of Gandhi’s action and political thinking in anti-colonial movements in the African continent. Corazza in particular highlights how fascination for the Mahatma’s moral stature and firmness in translating non-violence into political action was challenged, within pan-African movements, under two main arguments: firstly, in particular in French colonies, non-violence was seen as an insufficient means to counter colonial despotism, while in fact emphasising the need for armed revolt; secondly, Gandhi’s manifest attitude to distinguish the plight of Indians to that of black people in South Africa, and his not-so-hidden racism, made him an ambivalent and at times controversial counterpart. This notwithstanding, Corazza shows how in particular W.E.B. Du Bois referred to Gandhi and India’s struggle for independence as a reference point and a “strategic symbol” to present the moral superiority of colonised people and to propose a united front of all non-white people in the fight against colonialism.

Following on the same line, the contribution by Concilio analyses Gandhi’s legacy in the political activity of South African anti-apartheid activists. Mainly following a sort of indirect dialogue between

Nelson Mandela and Gandhi through the former's autobiography, Concilio too delves into the Mahatma's ambivalent reception in South Africa, where his high morality stood as a beacon for conceiving non-violent forms of political action, while his overtly separatist positions and his refusal to join the plight of Indian with that of black people continued to rise suspicion and hostility among many leaders. Far from pretending to issue definite judgements, both chapters interestingly highlight how the complexity of Gandhi's presence and political actions in South Africa accounted also for many contradictions, but was nonetheless full of meanings and brought important legacies far beyond the limits of the Indian community in the country and the temporal frame of the Mahatma's life.

On a similar tone, but moving away from South Africa in space and time, Andrea Carosso brings the analysis to the United States and the anti-segregation movement that began in the mid of the 1950s. If in the South African context Gandhi's ambivalence towards the black population was seen by many as a crucial limitation to fully embracing him as an example of political mobilisation, one of the key issues that brought the Mahatma in the anti-segregation movement was the meaning and real effectiveness of non-violent action. In analysing Martin Luther King's slow and meditated approach to Gandhi's politics, Carosso shows that adopting non-violence as the technique of the struggle was not, and could not mean the blind use of a means of collective mobilisation, it was result, instead, of a process of re-elaboration and re-signification of its purposes and meanings to the struggle of black Americans for the recognition of their civil rights.

In the essay that opens the second section, Torri moves back to evaluate Gandhi's role in the struggle for India's independence, with specific regard to the progressive deterioration of the dialogue between the Congress and the Muslim league. As it is well known, the outcome of decades of anticolonial political mobilisation and attempts at finding a common terrain in imagining a postcolonial state was the partition of the subcontinent, after a stream of unprecedented widespread violence between Hindus and Muslims. In his historical reconstruction, the author seeks to evaluate Gandhi's political responsibilities and comes to a rather clearcut conclusion as he states that, as far as the "Muslim question" is concerned, Gandhi "piled political mistakes upon political mistakes and powerfully contributed to one of the most terrifying man-made tragedy in the history of modern and contemporary South Asia" (: 68).

Again more nuanced are the two following contributions, which aim at reconstructing the context around two specific aspects of Gandhi's politics. Both shift the focus from the Mahatma's legacy and impact to his own thinking, political positions and moral understandings. Casolari brings at the centre of her analysis a comparison between India's partition and the division of Palestine, focusing on Gandhi's complex position towards the matter. By focusing on a less studied aspect of Gandhi's thought

such as this one, this essay has the undoubted merit of relating the two partitions, the connections between them and the commonalities that make them highly intertwined events. In this sense, Gandhi appears as a “privileged witness” and an active, although somehow marginal, participant in the process but, more interestingly, through his eyes Casolari reconstructs the web of events and people that link the two partitions under the heavy shadow of British colonialism.

Focusing on Gandhi’s later years, in his fascinating analysis Eijiro Hazama reads Gandhi’s understanding of secularism in relation to his experiments with *Brahmacarya*, or celibacy/sexual continence. Hazama makes a very wise and original use of Gandhi’s text, looking at the simultaneity of articles on these two apparently far aspects, secularism and abstinence, giving meaning to the choice of different languages – English, Hindi and Gujarati – to release them and convincingly relating them as two consistent aspects of his moral and social views. Hazama draws a portrait of the constant dialogue between inner religious sphere and public political life that fully grasps the complexity of the Mahatma’s strife to reconcile individual life and social change.

Finally, the two essays in the last section propose the reading of Gandhi’s legacy and influence with an eye to nowadays India. How are the Mahatma’s example and thoughts relevant in today’s India? Jayogseni Mandal suggests a rediscovery of Gandhian economic thinking and proposal towards a humanitarian capitalism as a possible means to direct contemporary financial capitalism towards a more sustainable turn. On the contrary, Pallavi Varma Patil and Roshni Ravi bring in the experience of grass root work to adapt and put into practice a model of education shaped on Gandhi’s idea of *Nai Talim* (or basic education). By showing the outcomes of a specific project, the two authors suggest that different educational models, more oriented towards an integration of practical activities related to farming, have the potential to foster a different understanding of schooling and reorient an idea of knowledge transmission in a more sustainable way.

Far from aspiring to be a definite voice on Gandhi and his understanding, this book has the undoubted merit of raising a range of different issues and readings, presenting the complexity and the multiple possible understandings of the Mahatma without pretending to give a single oriented explanation. The essays are short and most of them point straight to the core a single aspect, which makes the reading enjoyable and interesting. However, this aspect represents also one of the main limits of the book: some of the chapters deal with large and complex aspects but in the few pages of a short essay the authors limit themselves to a brief outline. In a way, it can resemble a collection of introductions, or a sketchbook, which can be nonetheless very useful to students, researchers and non-academic readers as a tool to access such a wide and complex world such as the scholarship on the Mahatma and his legacies.

References

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