1. Introduction

Gandhi was an undervalued politician in Europe (and certainly not only in Europe) in the second half of the 20th century. In the West, the legacy of Gandhi has often been seen in a superficial and contradictory way, as something well-intentioned but not applicable to the modern world.

Many have seen him with some sympathy, as a good person, almost a holy man, appreciating, at best, his message of non-violence and authenticity, but not very useful for the modern Western world. At most, they have used some of his famous quotes, such as original and brilliant messages, but not expanding much further. Many political leaders and statesmen visit his memorial when they go to Delhi; however, for most of them, it is a politically useless icon, since in their view Gandhi longed for a kind of medieval world and of saints.

Of course there have been numerous and valuable exceptions to this scenario. Around the world, many followers of Mahatma Gandhi have been working for spreading his message. This is the case, for example, of the Community of the Ark, founded by Lanza del Vasto, and other organizations in France, Italy and many other countries. In my country, some people were also influenced by Gandhi’s message, such as conscientious objectors and unsubmissives to the military service, and some other organizations in defense of active non-violence. But, in any case, they were, in general, minority movements in the European political context. An interesting experience was that of the German Green Party, founded in the 1980s, with leaders such as Petra Kelly, who accepted some aspects derived from the Gandhian philosophy.

Why did Gandhi have so little influence in Europe after his death? There are several reasons, but I will only point out those that I find interesting to highlight.

First of all, there is a lack of knowledge, or simply a superficial knowledge of Gandhi: his life, work, thoughts and legacy. For this reason, the depth of his message has not yet been understood, with some exceptions. I am referring, of course, to the politically and ideologically most influential and powerful environments.

And to a large extent, this is due to an ethnocentric attitude of the Western political philosophy and science, which considers, at least implicitly, that the only useful political science can only be developed in Europe or North America, with the appalling results known.

Another reason is the discomfort generated by many of its proposals. The primacy of morality in all political action, his spirituality, his conception of love as a weapon of transformation of another, his radical nonviolence, the importance of self-control and introspection, his search for
Truth… In a first approach, many of these concepts contrast with the terms that have shaped political thought and action in the West.

Gandhi’s message is, definitely, much more radical than it may seem, since it points to a global social change that affects, from the outset, the lifestyle and attitudes of the individual. It subordinates the economy to the ethics, opposes the industrial productivism at all costs, and advocates an austere but more equitable life, the dialogue, the personal responsibility and the social commitment with the poorest. That is to say, Gandhi does not postpone the “new man” after the revolution, but he builds himself (and herself) while at the same time trying to change society. And, moreover, Gandhi preached by example.

2. A chance for Gandhi’s message

In the last few years things are changing in this sense. The emergence of new movements and forms of mobilization arising from the European crisis of the late 20th century and the economic crisis in the capitalist world of the beginning of this century, accompanied by a deep ecological crisis, some of the issues raised by Gandhi have been brought up to the agenda. Some examples of this are the movements that arose in Eastern Europe, the Arab Spring and, above all, the emergence of massive and non-violent protest movements around the world, without going into valuing here the complexity and diversity of interests and motivations that have played in each situation.

The crisis of the financial and speculative capitalism, accompanied by the superfluous enrichment of a few people, and the massive and progressive impoverishment of large parts of the population worldwide, together with the global ecological crisis that puts into question the hyper-developmental model linked to the Capitalist benefit exacerbated by the predominance of neoliberal policies, puts on the agenda too some of Gandhi’s considerations about the relationship between economics, ethics and ecology. And these are not only raised by Gandhi.

Finally, the serious and permanent wars, worldwide, as well as the new type of conflicts like terrorism, fundamentalisms, new kinds of civil conflicts and geostrategic conflicts also make it necessary and urgent to expand Gandhi’s ideas on dialogue and non-violence.

2.1 The new movements in the Spanish State

In May 2011, a protest movement known as the movement of the outraged - or 15-M - emerged in many Spanish cities. This citizen movement occupied many squares in the most important cities, especially in Madrid and Barcelona. It was a peaceful but radical protest against the consequences of the economic crisis over the popular classes, against the evictions of people who could not pay their mortgages or rents because of having lost their jobs, against the domination of banks and big economic corporations, and against the precariousness of jobs and wages. It also sought to promote a more real and participatory democracy. In short, a change was sought.

In some cities, the occupation of the squares lasted for several weeks. Numerous political and social debates were organized, looking for alternatives. Many demonstrations and support marches were organized. A fundamental characteristic of this movement was its adherence to non-violence. No outbreak of violence was allowed. Many references to Gandhi and some of his proposals and quotations appeared on the debates and banners, also the role of nonviolent civil disobedience to achieve deeper economic and social change as well as the introduction of ethics into politics and economics. This type of movements has been developed in recent years in several parts of the globe.
Another example is what is happening in Catalonia. Catalonia is a nation within the Spanish State that has been subjected to constant political conflict for a long time, with periods of calm and periods of agitation, and that faced extreme subjugation during the Franco dictatorship. Its language was banned during the first years of the Franco regime and was later only tolerated, but without recognized official presence. Its very culture was also attacked. With the transition to democracy in Spain, after the death of Franco, some changes have taken place but not to the expectation of the most of Catalans. The dissatisfaction among Catalans continues even today. This community has not ceased to claim its cultural and social identities and has constantly sought a fair space in the Spanish State, without success.

For this reason a powerful mass movement in Catalonia began in 2010. This movement claims the right to self-determination. An important section of people involved in this movement aims at the creation of an independent state. In the context of the refusal of the State and the government of Spain to negotiate a referendum so that Catalans decide their status, numerous demonstrations have been taking place all over Catalonia. Not only millions of people undertook demonstrations every year, but also they organized a referendum in November of 2014. This referendum was not allowed by the Spanish government even though almost two and a half million people participated in this consultation. It should be noted that the total population of Catalonia barely exceeds seven million people. The Catalan people have always insisted on the peaceful and non-violent character of this movement and some of its leaders have openly cited the example of Gandhi and Luther King. The Catalan autonomous government has summoned a referendum in October 2017 and some of its members have been subjected to threatening or prosecution.

In conclusion, all these movements and many others have demonstrated nonviolent civil disobedience, which Gandhi considered as a substitute for armed revolution in order to transform the society. Many of them have cited the example of Gandhi, Luther King, Rosa Parks, Mandela et al. In my view, all these developments reinforce the idea that this is the right moment to rework Gandhi's message, update it, spread it widely, and - why not? - turn it into a project or policy proposal, or at least into an important part of a broader and more open proposal, also in the West!

3. **Strengths of Gandhi’s legacy**

   There are aspects of Gandhi's thought and work that are very specific to his time and culture, but many other aspects have a universal character and have not lost their validity; we only need to rethink them according to the needs and mentality of our time. I will indicate which of his contributions are more valid and useful, in my view.

   a) **His conception of non-violence**

   It is not a passive or submissive non-violence; but it is quite the opposite ever active. For him, non-violence is a force, capable of transforming the individual, even the most hostile opponent. In addition, it has a great political efficiency as he demonstrated in both South Africa and British India. It is an active and radical nonviolence, whose ultimate expression was civil disobedience, with methods of struggle such as strikes, marches, boycotts, and also the use of fasting. Gandhi considered this method morally superior to the use of violence that, even when it can be considered justified, leaves a sense of resentment and hatred. Gandhi’s conception of nonviolence also has profound philosophical, psychological and social connotations.

   Another question is the following debate: whether non-violence is always possible or there are certain situations in which responding to violence with defensive violence can be
inevitable. In my opinion, this does not negate much of Gandhi's considerations and experience in this regard.

b) **A change in the economic system or an economy based on ethics**
These are also ideas defended by Gandhi: economic equality, eradication of poverty and overexploitation and equitable distribution of wealth. In short, it would be an economy aimed at the service of people and not the other way round.

An economy based on well-understood austerity, absence of any sort of waste of resources and the limited resources at the disposal of the individuals are socially shared which in turn guarantees dignified life for everybody. Also, science and technology must be at the service of humanity and under democratic and ethical control. Obviously, it is necessary to update and adapt the economic and social ideas of Gandhi, taking into consideration the present situation prevailing in the world today.

c) **The dialogue between cultures, religions and politicians in a conflicting world**
This is a strong point of his legacy. A dialogue that he advocated throughout his life, both among the British opponents and especially among the religious and cultural communities in India: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and all other religions and groups. He committed his life to this task which in fact was the main cause for his assassination.

Furthermore, the significance of his emphasis on dialogue. In today's world context there is an obvious need to promote the dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts, which should crystallize in the transformation of the UN into an effective international organization and/or the creation of other organizations fulfilling this function. Moreover, the creation of forces of containment, pacification and response to aggressions, of international scope, is an interesting subject to develop.

d) **The revolt against all types of injustice, whatever may be the form and a leadership model**
Consequently Gandhi in the course of his political action successfully implemented techniques like the "non-cooperation with the evil" and civil disobedience in his revolt against all types of injustices. It involved embracing the cause of the most helpless and mistreated people through these techniques. Gandhian pacifism, therefore, has a strong social content. Untouchables, poor peasants, workers, women, adivasis and miserable neighborhoods were objects of his concern, and Gandhi opted for a simple life, like them, and often stayed among them. That is why he could speak of "socialism" with emphasis on non-violence.

Gandhi developed a method of original and effective social and political activism based on the techniques of Satyagraha with emphasis on Truth and Ahimsa (Non-violence). In his scheme of things, civil disobedience and the Constructive Programme go hand in hand. It is worth highlighting the diversity and creativity of the forms of struggle used by Gandhi, often linked to this "constructive programme" which anticipated aspects of the kind of society that he aspired to build, seeking coherence between ends and means. In addition, Gandhi offers us a model of leadership based on exemplarity, ethical coherence, absence of demagogy or sectarianism, empathy and ability to dialogue, combined with great firmness.

e) **Harmony with nature. An ecological and holistic vision**
Gandhi was very critical about the idea of technological and mechanical “progress” of capitalism. Inspired by Ruskin, he believed that the excessive machinery emerged after the industrial revolution would lead to extreme dehumanized society and subjugated workers, which in turn pervert the rhythm of natural life and destroy nature. He criticized industrialization and large scale factories, contaminated cities and suburbs where the workers lived. This vision related him with the criticism of W. Benjamin, E. Fromm, E. Schumacher and I. Illich, to cite a few examples, or more recently some economists like Serge Latouche and other theorists of the degrowth movement. And if we add his criticism of excessive production resulting in waste and his respect for nature, Gandhi anticipated many of the issues and concerns raised by the environmental movement; to a large extent he was a precursor of it.

In short, Gandhi believed in a society not based on wasteful production or the material growth; a society in which the technology and machinery would be at the service of humans and not the opposite. He also believed in an austere life based on greater equality and social justice. At the same time, he warned against the destruction of nature and advocated for a harmonious life with nature. He not only defended decentralized societies instead of Statist centralism, but also approved the nationalizations of the means of production wherever necessary. Of course there are very debatable aspects in his vision of technology, science, economics and society, but we can still obtain many useful teachings from many of his ideas.

4. Some weak or more questionable points of his legacy

Claiming the validity and relevance of the legacy of Gandhi does not mean taking on all of its views and opinions as if it were a strict religion or an act of faith. Along with many elements that we have seen as useful, there are others that need a critical review and even those we cannot necessarily share. And that is the most effective way to defend most of his legacy, the opposite would be to turn it into a static religion and thus render it unusable for the current world. I will point out here simply some aspects that need to be reconsidered and updated, or even those in that we do not necessarily have to coincide with Gandhi.

- It is necessary to review and update the economic and social model in which Gandhi was thinking. In the 21st century we cannot only think of a society of small farmers and craftsmen or craftswomen, but also take into account the problems of an industrial and post industrial society, including the use of new technologies, etc. This does not invalidate a basic principle of Gandhi: that the economy and technology must be at the service of human beings and not the other way round, and that we must live in harmony with nature.

f) Non-dissociation between social revolution and individual transformation

This is, in my opinion, one of the most original and important contributions of Gandhi, because of the depth and veracity of this idea, and the way in which he combined and carried out in praxis in his work with the Indian masses. His conviction is that, in order to build a more just society, each person must also transform himself, in parallel and without dissociating or postponing one task to the other. This is really an important contribution to the theory of social transformation.

This led him to a great ethical demand with himself and his supporters and to promote self-criticism, especially his own. And therefore to seek coherence in one’s own life, it is essential to value the capacity of individual for introspection and reflection, which is, by the way, a good antidote against fanaticism. This is really an important part of his legacy, which is not easy for a Western mind to understand.
We must also reconsider some of Gandhi’s positions about science and technology which, on the other hand, are debatable. It is necessary to adapt his approaches and proposals to the reality of today’s world: demographic, technological, scientific..., taking advantage of scientific and technological advances that can benefit humanity and the planet, and rejecting those who go against it.

The role of philosophy and practice of nonviolence is, of course, essential. But we must also take into account how to respond to specific situations of violence and how to deal with a violent offensive. The role of international contention forces, of police or another kind of force that contains violence in certain situations, the issue of the legitimate defence, etc...

Finally, one of the points that I consider most questionable of Gandhi’s positions is his excessive moralism, in general, but especially in matters of sexuality. This topic refers to issues such as the role of sexuality in human life, the vision about the right to pleasure and enjoyment or its repression, with the consequences that it has. Many historians, anthropologists, psychologists and psychoanalysts have spoken about the negative consequences of a strongly repressed society. A different thing is the personal option for celibacy or *brahmacharya*, always respectable, of course.

At this point, it is necessary to take into account many factors that determined the positions of Gandhi and that obsessed him with the control of his own sexuality. Some of them are the premature marriage, the death of his father, his sense of guilt, the cultural context, some theories about self-control of impulses, etc.

5. Conclusion
An important part of Gandhi’s legacy can be very useful today. Taking advantage of its essence, but adapting it to our century and to our globalized world is fundamental if we want to keep his legacy alive.

In a world immersed in a deep crisis, today it is more urgent and necessary than ever to take advantage of and spread his message, his experience, his methods... without pretending that it is the only ideology or path to transform this world, but doing it in dialogue with other traditions, thinkers, ideologies, activists and movements that seek to advance towards a better humanity. This is a good task for those who claim the usefulness and validity of Gandhi’s legacy, so rich, deep and complex.

6. Spreading his legacy: A few ideas
We could think of various initiatives to spread his legacy at a European and/or international level. Here are some ideas.
- Organization of open meetings in order to debate and spread his legacy, with a central act.
- Organization of exhibitions about the life, work, actions, ideas of Gandhi. Its cultural, historical, social and political context.
- Lectures and debates. With participation of scholars and activists from India and other countries.
- Some international campaigns

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