

DISCUSSIONI

Rivoluzione senza confini: i viaggi globali del maoismo (a cura di Laura De Giorgi)

Julia Lovell, *Maoism. A Global History*, London, The Bodley Head, Penguin Random House, 2019, 624 pp., € 34,35

ne discutono

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Il libro di Julia Lovell, che ha ricevuto il Cundhill History Prize della McGill University ed è finalista per il britannico Baillie Gifford Prize per le opere non letterarie, ricostruisce la storia della circolazione e dell'impatto mondiale del maoismo dalla fine della seconda guerra mondiale fino ai giorni nostri.

Compiendo un lungo percorso a spirale che parte dalla Cina della fine degli anni '30, attraversa tutti i continenti nei decenni della guerra fredda e della globalizzazione e si conclude nella Repubblica Popolare Cinese governata da Xi Jinping. L'a., studiosa interessata in primo luogo all'interazione fra la Cina e il contesto internazionale,¹ punta a offrire una visione d'insieme del ruolo rivestito dal maoismo in diversi contesti politici, sociali e culturali, per opera di molteplici attori, accomunati dall'ammirazione per la rivoluzione cinese e decisi a emularne metodi e linguaggio.

L'obiettivo è ambizioso e, sotto molti aspetti, inedito per ampiezza, sia geografica che cronologica. Non per nulla si tratta un volume di oltre 600 pagine, la cui lettura è agevolata dallo stile narrativo scelto da Lovell, che, se in diversi passaggi ricorda quello dei reportage (e d'altronde il volume si colloca tanto nella dimensione della ricerca storica

1. Julia Lovell, *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2006; Ead., *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China*, Basingstoke/Oxford, Picador, 2011.

quanto in quella della divulgazione) a scapito dell'impostazione strettamente accademica, riesce nondimeno a tenere il filo del discorso analitico attraverso tempi e luoghi diversi.

L'intento dichiarato è quello di mettere in evidenza come il maoismo costituisca non solo un elemento imprescindibile per la comprensione della storia della Cina dal secondo dopoguerra a oggi, ma anche un fattore di grande importanza nelle dinamiche della guerra fredda, la cui influenza a livello mondiale è stata rilevante nell'emergere dell'ordine neoliberale, a partire dagli ultimi decenni del XX secolo, quale reazione alla mobilitazione rivoluzionaria ispirata alle idee di Mao in tante regioni del mondo sviluppato e non. Se il maoismo fu, come si ritiene, una "sinizzazione" del marxismo, le sue dimensioni internazionali non possono però essere investigate guardando solo a monte, e quindi alla sua complessa filiazione dal marxismo-leninismo, ma anche a valle, per la valenza che esso ha assunto come strategia insurrezionale e ideologia rivoluzionaria dopo, o meglio, a seguito della vittoria del Partito comunista cinese e della fondazione della Repubblica Popolare Cinese. È nella prospettiva di offrire, a partire dai singoli casi, una "grande narrativa" dei viaggi del maoismo nel mondo che il libro, dunque, si distingue da lavori più specialistici, e mostra la sua specificità e anche i suoi limiti.

Su un piano storiografico, lo studio di Lovell va d'altra parte collocato all'interno di una tendenza più ampia, che mira a rivisitare e mettere in luce il ruolo internazionale della Cina nel periodo moderno e contemporaneo, riflettendo da un lato la ricezione del *global turn* nell'ambito delle storie d'area, dall'altro sollecitazioni contemporanee, quali l'interesse a inquadrare storicamente la proiezione non solo economica, ma anche politica e culturale a livello globale della Repubblica Popolare Cinese negli ultimi venti anni.

Che quest'ultima sia una delle preoccupazioni di Lovell, d'altronde, si evince anche dal suo stesso lavoro, che menziona proprio all'inizio del volume il tema dell'attuale presenza cinese nel mondo e, come già anticipato, torna a Xi Jinping e all'eredità del maoismo oggi alla fine del suo percorso di analisi, con l'intento dunque di offrire una prospettiva storica a quello che, a un osservatore superficiale, sembra costituire una trasformazione recente della politica estera cinese. La storia del maoismo globale è, per Lovell, in primo luogo la storia della visione internazionale della dirigenza cinese sul ruolo della Cina nel mondo.

È, d'altronde, una preoccupazione che determina lo stesso taglio della ricerca, che punta in modo esplicito a investigare e mettere in luce il ruolo attivo dei comunisti cinesi nel proporre la propria rivoluzione come modello mondiale, non solo attraverso una propaganda capillare verso l'estero, ma anche istruendo e finanziando le attività dei gruppi rivoluzionari in varie e diverse aree geografiche.

La convinzione di Mao e della classe dirigente cinese del carattere e la valenza globali della propria esperienza rivoluzionaria costituiscono, nella prospettiva del volume, il motore del viaggio del maoismo nel mondo, il cui inizio viene datato alla redazione e pubblicazione del celeberrimo reportage di Edgar Snow sul Partito comunista cinese a

Yan'an, *Stella Rossa sulla Cina*, nel 1936.² Strumento fondamentale della costruzione di una rappresentazione, al tempo stessa eroica e saggia, del leader cinese e della sua rivoluzione destinata a penetrare nell'immaginario collettivo internazionale fin dagli anni '40, il reportage fu redatto con l'appoggio e il contributo attivo della dirigenza comunista cinese, tradotto in varie lingue ma anche in cinese, e quindi destinato ad avere un impatto anche nelle comunità cinesi all'estero; di fatto il lavoro di Snow costituisce l'emblema di quel gioco di specchi fra dimensioni domestica ed esterna che, per l'a., rappresenta un elemento imprescindibile del maoismo globale.

Il volume analizza l'invenzione del "lavaggio del cervello" quale carattere distintivo del comunismo cinese nell'ostilità degli Stati Uniti verso la Cina degli anni '50, a partire dalla guerra di Corea, per poi concentrarsi in particolare sull'impatto internazionale del cosiddetto "high Maoism", cioè la fase di radicalizzazione ideologica e politica della Repubblica Popolare dal Grande Balzo in Avanti nel 1958, la rottura con l'Urss e la Rivoluzione culturale negli anni '60. L'analisi di Lovell individua ovviamente nella scissione fra Unione Sovietica e Repubblica Popolare Cinese un passaggio fondamentale negli sforzi, da parte della Cina, per l'affermazione del maoismo come strategia rivoluzionaria antimperialista a livello mondiale, grazie anche a un lavoro di propaganda sistematica e intensa e di sostegno esplicito ai propri simpatizzanti in molte regioni. Il volume segue, dunque, gli sviluppi dei movimenti ispirati a Mao e dell'influenza diretta e indiretta della Repubblica Popolare nelle mobilitazioni armate anticoloniali e rivoluzionarie a partire dall'Indonesia, per poi spostarsi alle guerre di liberazione in Africa, al complicato rapporto con il Vietnam, alla Cambogia di Pol Pot, fino ai movimenti maoisti delle proteste giovanili degli anni '60 in Occidente e del terrorismo in Germania e Italia, per poi procedere con il Perù di Sendero Luminoso, i Naxaliti in India e il maoismo in Nepal.

La narrazione intreccia storia internazionale e analisi della strategia della Repubblica Popolare Cinese verso l'estero (in particolare nelle aree geopolitiche di maggior interesse per la Cina come il Sud-Est asiatico) con la ricostruzione delle esperienze dei protagonisti e delle loro relazioni con la Cina maoista, oltre che con il racconto degli eventi e dei processi locali di appropriazione e adattamento del maoismo. L'ampio spettro geografico trattato dal volume, nondimeno, finisce con l'affiancare in un'unica cornice storica mondiale molteplici esperienze nazionali e locali, ognuna delle quali caratterizzata da percorsi e specificità – culturali, sociali, politiche ed economiche – di non facile comparazione.

L'attenzione dell'a. a mettere in luce il ruolo attivo della Cina, inoltre, implicherebbe la necessità di poter accedere a fonti e informazioni qualificate sui rapporti internazionali del Partito comunista cinese negli anni della guerra fredda. Cosa che rimane complicata nella

2. Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, London, Victor Gollancz-Left Book Club, 1937 (*Stella rossa sulla Cina*, Torino, Einaudi, 1965, traduzione di Renata Pisu).

Repubblica Popolare Cinese, dato che le relazioni estere negli anni del maoismo costituiscono un tema molto sensibile, tale da rendere non accessibili i documenti relativi, come lei stessa riconosce. La censura su molti aspetti eventi rimane, in Cina, un ostacolo di non poco conto nello studio dei rapporti internazionali nei decenni di Mao.

La ricerca di Lovell si è invece avvalsa di una crescente mole di letteratura accademica e di memorie sulla ricezione del maoismo fuori dai confini della Cina. Si tratta di una letteratura di valore ineguale, in cui spesso la dimensione della memoria diventa preminente rispetto all'analisi strutturata degli eventi e dei processi. L'esito è che si enfatizza il carattere narrativo del lavoro, incentrato, in vari casi, sulle persone che, della rivoluzione maoista, si fecero interpreti e fautori fuori dalla Repubblica Popolare Cinese. La scelta di Lovell, dunque, di lasciare spazio alla dimensione esperienziale del maoismo e, di fatto, al racconto dei protagonisti riflette anche una serie di costrizioni oggettive allo studio del soggetto. In assenza di accesso agli archivi cinesi, spesso solo la documentazione degli archivi esteri ha permesso di gettare un po' più di luce nelle dinamiche effettive dell'intervento cinese al di fuori dei suoi confini, e pure sempre in una prospettiva parziale.

Se una delle chiavi di lettura dell'a. è quella di voler indagare, per quanto possibile, il ruolo attivo della Cina e della sua dirigenza nella propagazione del verbo maoista all'estero, Lovell non è particolarmente interessata, però, ad analizzare in modo dettagliato il profilo ideologico e dottrinale delle idee di Mao nel processo di adattamento e appropriazione in tanti contesti diversi né ad indagare il ruolo dell'immaginario e della propaganda maoista nella configurazione della cultura globale negli anni '60 e '70.³ Del maoismo, Lovell enfatizza in primo luogo il carattere di strategia politico-militare – pur non negando l'attrazione utopica delle sue aspirazioni egualitarie per diversi gruppi sociali –, identificando come chiave del suo successo l'efficienza comunicativa del linguaggio concettuale e retorico di Mao anche su un'audience poco sofisticata sul piano intellettuale. Per l'a. sono alcuni concetti base del maoismo – il volontarismo, la mobilitazione di massa, la centralità della disciplina militare di partito, l'accettazione delle contraddizioni, il sistematico controllo sociale di gruppo – oltre che la capacità cinese di proiettare all'estero un'immagine positiva della propria rivoluzione, ad averne decretato il successo presso quegli intellettuali che se ne fecero interpreti, adottandolo come strumento per legittimare e organizzare la propria lotta armata, sia nella giungla che nei villaggi andini o nelle moderne città europee.

Il filo conduttore della mobilitazione maoista a livello globale va identificato, nella prospettiva del volume, essenzialmente nella legittimazione della violenza come principa-

3. Si veda ad esempio Alexander C. Cook (ed.), *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014; Jacopo Galimberti, Noemi De Haro-Garcia, Victoria H.F. Scott (eds.), *Art, Global Maoism and the Cultural Revolution*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2019.

le strumento di lotta e di controllo all'interno dell'organizzazione e, in tanti casi, nell'affermarsi del culto della personalità del leader, certamente Mao Zedong, ma anche dei suoi emuladori locali, come il Comandante Gonzalo di Sendero Luminoso. La centralità della violenza fisica ma anche psicologica, il personalismo del potere e una certa spregiudicatezza ideologica costituirebbero dunque i tratti distintivi del maoismo nel suo viaggio dentro e fuori la Cina, al di là delle possibilità di emancipazione e di liberazione dall'oppressione che poteva rappresentare o ha rappresentato per i suoi sostenitori. Lovell non nega che il maoismo sia stato anche questo, e che la sua eredità sul mondo odierno sia articolata. Tuttavia la narrazione che ne offre riflette le letture storiche che fanno del maoismo soprattutto un'espressione di violenza politica organizzata, se non anche delle idiosincrasie del suo ispiratore e dei suoi emuli.

Proprio per la complessità e la varietà dei temi trattati, per la prospettiva globale offerta dal libro, ma anche per la chiave di lettura che Lovell ha proposto nel delineare una storia che ancora riverbera nel presente in Asia e nella Cina stessa, si è deciso di invitare alcuni storici di profilo scientifico diverso a leggere e condividere con «Il mestiere di storico» la propria lettura del volume. La discussione che segue offre le riflessioni su *Maoism: A Global History* dalla prospettiva di uno storico della Cina (Fabio Lanza), dell'India (Subrata Mitra), di storia internazionale (Elidor Mēhilli) e dell'America Latina (Miguel Ángel Urrego). Per ragioni personali, Julia Lovell non ha potuto preparare la sua replica, che speriamo comunque di ospitare in un numero successivo.

Fabio Lanza

Julia Lovell deserves a great deal of praise simply for tackling the very daunting project of writing a history of global Maoism; for engaging a huge amount of secondary literature in several languages; for her ability to traverse multiple continents, physically and intellectually; and for tying together the many threads of this truly global narrative. The result is a mammoth of a book – over 450 pages – which starts with a historical account of the birth and development of the Maoist state; traces the construction and diffusion of Maoist revolutionary praxis and mythology, through the work of Edgard Snow; and describes the way Maoism then reverberated around the world, from the 1950s to the 1980s, throughout Malaysia, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Peru, Cambodia, the United States, and Europe. The last chapter explores the contemporary efforts to recover and re-deploy Maoist concepts and vocabulary under Xi Jinping. Each chapter is replete with vivid details, and Lovell's narrative moves effortlessly and with brio – not surprisingly, as she is also a truly gifted writer and translator.

While written by a scholar, this is a book intended for a popular audience and should not, thus, be judged by the standards of academic historical production. Yet, even as a work

of popular non-fiction, *Maoism: A Global History* is not entirely successful in presenting a history of Maoism. This is the case, in large part, because the book fails to achieve the goals that the author set for herself. Lovell argues that she will put Mao and Maoism back at the center of the historical and political narrative of the twentieth century, re-centering «its ideas and experiences as major forces of the recent past, present and future that have shaped – and are shaping – the world, as well as China» (p. 460). She rightly questions the «ability of these ideas to travel» (p. 348) and wishes to investigate the extent to which they actually did inform movements and revolutionary practices in places as disparate as Peru and Tanzania, Paris and Kathmandu. These are worthy aims, which I and many others who have written about the complex history of (global) Maoism all share. Lovell is absolutely right when she argues that «exploring global Maoism is vital to comprehending not only Chinese history, but also radical politics in many parts of the globe – the politics of disenfranchisement, discontent and impoverishment» (p. 19). The main problem with Lovell's intervention is that it does not provide even a tentative analysis of what Maoism was *as politics*, what constituted it as a theory and practice of governance and revolution, and what aspects of it were so attractive for activists (no matter how naïve) across the globe. Rather, she suggests instead that there was absolutely nothing to it, or at least nothing beyond a crazed personality cult and a dangerous penchant for violence.

For a book declaredly about Maoism, Lovell shows no interest in engaging the political theories and governing practices that defined that historical experience, theories and practices that many scholars around the world have and do take quite seriously and analyze in great depth. The claim that Maoism was simply window dressing has been roundly rejected by most recent histories of the People's Republic. Lovell's claims thus seem anachronistic, reminiscent of the very Cold-War sentiments she chronicles in the book. She describes the «mass line», for example, as «one of Mao's favorite catchphrases» (p. 7), which was really just a «framework for ideological unity and “thought work” in Mao's party», «the basis for mass mobilization», and «the theoretical justification for the Ccp's claim that its methods were “democratic”» (p. 47). In Lovell's telling, a genuine attempt to seriously challenge liberal models for democratic participation – which did very practically shape the daily workings of the Party-State at all levels – is reduced to an ideological ploy, a transparent disguise for unchecked authoritarianism. Lovell is equally dismissive of other aspects of Ccp governance and ideology – disputes with the Ussr are expressions of «sectarian pettiness» (p. 146) or «chilly abstractions» (p. 393). For Lovell, it seems, there is nothing in Maoist politics that needs explication or deeper understanding, except perhaps for the apparently surprising fact that anyone ever believed in it.

In Lovell's history, Maoism becomes simply an after-effect of the mercurial personality of the Chairman («a cynical, megalomaniac sex addict») and its crucial tenets are devoid of any political meaning; then they naturally appear as evidence of «disdain», «paranoia», and «obsession» (p. 378). Anecdotes that scholars have judged to be dubious

are presented as factual explanations for mass movements and crucial foreign policy decisions. Of course I appreciate the fact that gossip makes the narrative more entertaining and intriguing for non-specialist readers, but Lovell has a scholarly responsibility to treat rumors and hearsay as just that. Instead she presents as evidence sources that are, at best, very problematic (such as Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*)⁴ and, at worst, have been totally discredited, even by scholars who are no fans of the Chairman (such as Chang and Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*).⁵ The uncritical use of such materials is especially worrisome given that Lovell does not deal at all with Mao's own writings, except for a few pithy sentences, often out of context and ridiculed as revolutionary pabulum.

This outlook means it is then impossible for Lovell to provide the explanation of Maoist politics that many readers will likely seek. For the same reason, while the book is full of rich, personal stories, she is also unable to explain what about Maoism made it so interesting and meaningful to so many people around the world. Take the Cultural Revolution, for example. Once reduced to an evil scheme, concocted by an aging, crazed, dictatorial mind, it is very difficult to make any sense of how and why it resonated so powerfully as an example for young leftists inside and outside of China. Lovell does not mention the long-standing problems of bureaucratization and inequality that had concerned Mao and other leaders since the late 1950s. She does not examine how the Cultural Revolution was an attempt to deal with the obdurate nature of capitalism and with the corruption and malfeasance among party members and state bureaucrats who, Mao believed, had become a new "oppressing class", a new bourgeoisie. These issues were at the center of the critique of Soviet revisionism and of the polemics of the Cultural Revolution. We might condemn the human cost of Mao's solutions, but the fact remains that they were precisely what made "high Maoism" resonate so deeply with young critics of the established leftist parties in Europe, South America, and the United States, where Mao provided a conceptual vocabulary and a practical inspiration.

Similarly, Lovell attributes French intellectuals' enthusiasm for Maoism to a «self-loathing, self-destructive quality» (p. 294), glossing over how the radical (and yes, violent) critique of the educational system, of knowledge production, and of the very role of the intellectual that the Cultural Revolution had put forward seemed germane to leftist French intellectuals facing their own crisis and their own separation from the working class. Once emptied of any political sense, Maoism can only be understood through psychology and pathology (words such as «intoxicated» and «obsessed» recur throughout the volume with regularity), or imitation, as when Lovell argues that there was no real difference between the Cultural Revolution and the Stalinist purges of the early 1930s

4. Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, New York, Random House, 1994.

5. Jung Chang, Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, London, Jonathan Cape, 2005 (*Mao la storia sconosciuta*, Milano, Longanesi, 2006, traduzione di Elisabetta Valdré).

(cf. p. 57). In this perspective, then, everything about Maoism, either in China or abroad, becomes either politically devoid or simply irrational.

Lovell is almost on the right track when she addresses (briefly) the complexity of Mao's thought. But she simplifies the analysis to argue that the main characteristic of Mao's ideas was their inconsistency. In Maoism, Lovell sees as «a body of contradictory ideas» where others have identified a theory of contradictions (p. 8); she sees, not a dialectical attempt to resist both Stalinism and Liberalism, but «an unstable political creed that simultaneously reveres a centralized party and mass leadership, collective obedience and anti-state rebellion» (p. 17). For the wrong reasons, she is right that contradiction was a key part of what gave Maoism «its potency, persuasiveness and mobility» (p. 59), but she suggests that Maoism's globalization occurred despite its nature, not because of it. What Chris Connery has seen as a «universalism in reverse» which was globalized as «specific, situated practice», Lovell characterizes as «universal in theory, parochial in practice», by which she means that Maoism vociferously claimed its global relevance, «while engaging in petty doctrinal dispute with the Soviet Union» (pp. 125-126).⁶ With these premises, it becomes very difficult for Lovell to pursue her own stated goal of reaffirming the central world-historical role of a political doctrine whose main features, for her, were parochialism and utter inconsistency. Somewhat paradoxically, she denies Maoism's global significance by arguing that it was nothing other than global, that it existed only because of its international effects, and that those were produced *in spite* of its contradictions and its political emptiness.

Without its global afterlives, Lovell tells us, Maoism «would have faded into a *historical hallucination*»; instead it survived and reproduced «like a *dormant virus*», whose existence is made visible only by the disease it creates (p. 150, italics mine). What she gives us then is the history of a viral epidemic of infected minds, whose origins and etiology are irrelevant. It's unfortunate that non-specialist readers will likely find this characterization convincing, as it goes against the collective effort of Prc historians who have spent the past 15-20 years working against these outdated views of Maoism as irrational or pathological. Readers of Lovell's book will not learn about all of the cutting-edge research that shows us how taking Maoism seriously – and focusing on the lived experiences of people for whom Maoism was both a political belief and a daily practice – actually produces better analysis and explanations than those reliant on psychology, personality, and intraparty strife.⁷

6. Christopher Connery, *The World Sixties*, in Rob Wilson, Christopher Leigh Connery (eds.), *The Worlding Project. Doing Cultural Studies in the Era of Globalization*, Santa Cruz, CA, New Pacific Press, 2007, p. 97.

7. Some examples of recent scholarship on Prc history include Jeremy Brown, *City Versus Countryside in Mao's China: Negotiating The Divide*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014; Sigrid Schmalzer, *Red Revolution, Green Revolution: Scientific Farming in Socialist China*, Chicago,

One does not have to agree with Mao or accept either the theoretical premises or the actual policies of Maoism to write its history. But we must, at a minimum, recognize it represented a real politics, an articulated and organized set of theoretical propositions, which in turn shaped political practices that were often coherent and convincing and usually meaningful and worthwhile to many of the people who undertook them. Even those who condemn Mao are more convincing when they argue that his ideas were dangerous precisely because they contained such a powerful logic. Most importantly, we do more than dismiss Mao when we fail to take Maoism seriously. We also dismiss and devalue the experiences of the millions of historical actors around the world who did take it seriously. It's not good politics, and it's not good history.

Subrata Mitra

Julia Lovell's accessible and engaging *Maoism: A Global History* stands out amidst the current flurry of literature on China's rise to global prominence. Its distinctiveness arises from the unique angle from which she approaches the significance of the Chinese presence in the global arena. Whereas the vast majority of commentators on China see the country through the angles of trade or geopolitics, Lovell's narrative seeks to conflate the materiality of China and the appeal of Maoist ideology in order to account for the exponential rise of this Asian giant. Added to this original take, Lovell's gift as a natural story-teller makes this massive book (606 closely printed pages), and its vast empirical stretch (the book covers no less than five continents!), a joy to read, but also a challenge to integrate its findings within the framework of a general theory of radical politics.

I. Lovell follows a historical-comparative method to string together a selected group of cases. Her intention is «to evaluate the power and appeal of Maoism beyond China where it has enjoyed a long afterlife in revolutionary movements based on Mao's theory of class struggle and guerrilla warfare» (p. 10), and to tease a general argument out of them. This project is based on the idea that «Maoism contains [...] ideas that have exerted an extraordinary tenacity and ability to travel» and «has put down roots in terrains culturally and geographically far removed from that of China». Her comparative grid takes in a

University of Chicago Press, 2016; Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2014; Aminda Smith, *Thought Reform and China's Dangerous Classes: Reeducation, Resistance, and the People*, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2012; Jeremy Brown, Matthew D. Johnson (eds.), *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2015.

vast space which includes «the tea plantations of northern India, the sierras of the Andes, Paris's fifth arrondissement the fields of Tanzania, the rice paddies of Cambodia and the terraces of Brixton» (*ibid.*). It would have been useful at this stage to set up a comparative grid to account for Maoism's appeal, building, perhaps on the triad of deep peasant discontent, perception of a rapacious state arrayed against it, and the successful case of Maoist insurgency as a beacon to all others. This heuristic device would have helped understand the case selection and cumulate the findings into a general theory of radical politics. As we shall see later in the review, the absence of this firm signposting gives the narratives a disjointed, episodic character.

Lovell's chosen method of analysis is to dissect the evolution of the "Maoist" movements in selected narratives in terms of their endogenous dynamic and exogenous connectivity, both ideological and material, with China. Lovell presents some fragments of this connectivity in a chronological appendix (pp. 467-486). But she provides no succinct and parsimonious model that could list the common variables in terms of which the narratives are analysed. All we have in the introduction is not of an intent to analyse «Maoism's ambivalent history and enduring appeal to power-hungry dreamers and to dispossessed rebels all over the world» (p. 10). The problem that emerges from absence of a heuristic model at the outset to unclutter the rich case studies becomes obvious as one goes through the rich material they present.

The case narratives, interesting though they are, suffer somewhat from their almost exclusive reliance on secondary sources. This has two unintended consequences. In the first place, one does not get the benefit of deep research on the specific case that could contribute to our general understanding of the enigma of Maoism: it appeals, but fails to deliver. In the second place, the narrators, chosen – perhaps on the basis of their availability and not any innate value for the central question – gives the method the appearance of cherry-picking. I will draw on my own background in Indian studies to dissect Lovell's representation of the Indian case to illustrate these points.

II. The title of the chapter on India, aptly entitled *China's Chairman, our chairman*, captures the essential failure of Maoism in India. Apart from minor infelicities, Lovell's coverage of events is mostly sound. Women recruits to the Naxalite creed do not present themselves in «bright saris» nor do they «dance in lines before a photograph of Chairman Mao» (p. 5). One sees these women in the Indian media mostly in olive uniforms, lining up as they train to shoot to kill, with country made guns, or weapons looted from the police. Similarly, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's younger son who went on to organise violent repression of discontent in India against Naxalites during the authoritarian Emergency regime of his mother (1975-1977) – was called Sanjay, not Sanjiv – though that could probably have rhymed with the name of her older son Rajiv. The moot question that is germane to the Indian case but does not come in for any discussion in depth is why

there has been no Indian Mao. Lovell does not explain why but we can find an explanation in the Indian psychoanalyst Ashis Nandy's *Intimate Enemy*.⁸

In his succinct analysis of the Indian mind, Nandy explains the mimetic character of what goes under the broad umbrella of “modern” in India. This includes revolutionary strategies. In Nandy's explanation, the residual and enduring legacy of colonial rule is mental slavery to the colonial mode of thinking, or in a radical reaction to colonial rule, its utter rejection. For Indian intellectuals, it had to be either the liberal doctrine of Mill or the cultural nationalist Savarkar. There is no equivalent of the dialectical synthesis as in China's “peasant” communism. Though Lovell does not go into the psychology of Indian Maoism, to her credit, she recounts a dramatic scene of some Indian comrades paying their respect to Chairman Mao, which brilliantly illustrates Nandy's diagnosis.

In Lovell's narrative of this encounter between the Indian Maoists and Mao: «As soon as Zhou had introduced them to the chairman as the Naxalite revolutionaries, San-
yal recalled, “Mao instantly clasped me to his chest [...]. I got completely lost in his hug. It was such an overwhelming experience that I was robbed of words”. However, even Mao – not renowned for his modesty – seems to have been uneasy at the cloying devotion of the Indian revolutionaries, telling them that their slogan “China's chairman is our chairman” was immature» (p. 362). Still, mechanical application of the Chinese model, and search for a «Yunan of India» (p. 369) led them to Naxalbari, which, in their imaginary, was close enough to the Chinese border for arms and cash and when needed, refuge; built on deep local poverty and had a radical leadership. All the “objective” conditions were there, but it did not lead to a Vietnam, nor to the emergence of a Ho Chi Minh. Why?

This is where one comes face to face with the conundrum of culture, context and comparative theory. Lovell is aware of the problematic character of her narrative. Had India swallowed Marxism and produced Maoist Naxalites in an Indian mould, lock-stock-and-barrel; or, did the Maoist variation of Marxism completely ingest some young Indians and melted down their Indianness in order to produce Naxalites, with the gumption to take on the might of the modern state? Lovell's response is cryptic.

In social composition of its leadership, the Indian and Nepali Maoist insurgencies follow a now familiar pattern. As in Peru, Cambodia, Western Europe and the US, the leadership of South Asian Maoism sprang from an educated elite. But Indian (and subsequently Nepali) Maoism also tells us something about the *chameleon attributes* of this political programme (emphasis added). South Asian Maoism has had to adapt to the caste system and ethnic fractiousness of Indian society [...] whose complexity makes textbook Marxists despair (p. 349).

Without a firm anchor in their own history and culture, the Indian radicals did not succeed in developing their own autonomous agenda. Instead, they became avid and en-

8. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy. Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonial Rule*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983.

thusiastic recipients of all shades of Marxism and allied techniques available on the global market. We learn from Lovell how the result has been tragic, leading to pointless killings, degradation of revolutionary violence into personal vendettas, ransom-taking and protection rackets. The whole strategy of «encirclement of the cities from rural bases», with the weapons being funded by money extracted from protection rackets was no match to the might of the Indian state (p. 371). In turn, the state could suppress but not elimination of the “root causes” of resentment and insurgency because, democratic states which draw their power and vision from reconciliation of interests as behoves an electoral regime is essentially limited when it comes to structural reform.

Even more reprehensible than the anomic violence and racketeering to sustain Maoist strategy, is the adulation that these pointless acts get from India’s «public intellectuals» like Arundhati Roy, painting the Maoists «as a credible alternative to the repressive, mendacious, greedy machinery of the neo-liberal Indian state» (p. 376). Roy depicts «the remarkable way in which India’s jungle Maoists have adapted the vague image and prestige of Mao as a rebel “eader” with “vision”, to give coherence to their anti-state, anti-corporate struggles on behalf of the poor and their degraded environment. They invoke the classic, uncompromising rhetoric of Maoist militancy to argue that only violent uprising can battle the depredations of the Indian state, a sham democracy allied with multinational business» (p. 377).

I find in Maoist squads (dalam) the same inexplicable, undecipherable death wish as among suicide terrorists, chasing after some vague utopia, expertly manipulated by strategists located at a safe distance from the scene of action. Dying on purpose⁹ is a serious challenge for political theory. India’s public intellectuals, who live in a fantasyland of revolutionary utopia do not take responsibility for the futility of their positions. Each life lost in this meaningless slaughter – Maoists and security forces – is a vote of no confidence against the elegant, catchy, output of these media pundits. To give credit to Lovell – her research is prodigious and reporting is balanced – she brilliantly captures the stalemate of Indian thinking on radical politics with a citation from Nalini Sundar, a disheartened observer of the Indian scene.

The activists insist on talking of the “root causes” of Maoism [...]. The security experts brush aside any reference to “root causes” and insist we talk of “Maoist violence”. The academics debate what violence means, the journalists worry about their next big newsbreak. And so it goes on, this endless parlour game of seminars and working lunches and papers on the conflict. I can no longer see the child in the forest (p. 383).

And that is where Lovell leaves the Indian discourse. She brings the reader enticingly close to the cutting edge, but fails to go the extra mile with a critical scrutiny into a the-

9. Riaz Hasan, *Life as a Weapon*, London, Routledge, 2011.

ory of radical politics that could explain the stalemate in which the Indian state and the warring groups of Indian Maoists are locked in.

I have gone at some depth into the Indian case to highlight the hiatus of narrative and its critical exegesis. Lovell could have highlighted the power of India's electoral democracy which turns rebels into stakeholders and continuously robs radical movements of their leaders as a limiting factor for radical politics in India. Perhaps, area experts from the other cases that form the narrative structure of the book can shed light on similar gaps in Lovell's narratives in 'their' cases, and analyse their connectivity to a general theory of radical politics. But that is not the path chosen by Lovell. A leitmotif that comes early declares flatly: «Maoism is the creed of winners and insiders, of losers and outsiders, of leaders and underdogs, of absolute rulers, vast, disciplined bureaucracies, and oppressed masses» (p. 59). Something that is all things to all people can only be nothing but a cypher. To support this cerebral ambivalence, Lovell quotes Bourseiller: «Maoism doesn't exist. It never has done. That, without doubt, explains its success» (*ibid.*). This is an early admission of defeat.

III. Two enigmas underpin Lovell's study.

First, Maoism, unlike classical Marxism, is a distinctively Chinese ideology, deeply steeped in Chinese history, culture and political tradition. How could this *indigenous ideology* have a global connectivity? What explains its resonance in the jungles of South and East India, Peru, the Latin Quarters of Paris and in Xi's China, the most ruthless purveyor of capitalism today?

Secondly, how could contemporary China, out to conquer the world the unabashed spirit of capitalism (Deng's famous aphorism of the cat comes to mind here), live in harmony with the revolutionary legacy of Mao, presiding over the fast-growing Chinese empire from his embalmed greatness in the heart of Beijing, not too far from the nerve centre of the Chinese Communist Party? Are Mao and Xi two faces of the same Chinese coin, out to conquer the world? Lovell emphatically asserts that Mao and his ideal remain central to the People's Republic and the legitimacy of the Communist government, without quite explaining how it could be the case.

I suspect, the answer to both paradoxes lies in the aspirational and idealistic appeal of Maoism to the dispossessed of the world, and its honest and pragmatic materialism, which, much more than Gandhi, Lenin or other iconic figures of the Left, appeals to all those who in their different ways, want a better life for themselves. The search for a unified vision and a collective utopia that underpins the narratives that Lovell so engagingly offers, is futile. In the age of globalisation, we all consume the same products, but the dreams that underpin these aspirations are not necessarily the same. The interface of the Maoist imaginaries that underpin Lovell's narratives is actually a blank. One can, like the Naxalites, Nepalese Maoists, the Shining Path and others write what one wants in

that blank space and still have the psychological comfort of belonging to the same global creed, despite the vast differences of conditions and imaginaries.

Mao lives: that much is clear from Lovell's account. Mao's thoughts, in its transmigration into thoughts of Xi, has an afterlife, not just in the embalmed body of the Great Helmsman in the Tiananmen Square, but in the Belt and Road, in the Pla, in the Ccp, and Chinese diplomats, battling their American colleagues in the name of free trade. Perhaps, quite inadvertently, global history – history without a centre – has provided the right platform for Lovell's main theme. She has implied as much, but the point could have been expressed more fully as a connecting thread to bridge the disparate cases that have been tucked in together between two covers.

To quote Lovell:

Mao, his strategies and political model remain central to the legitimacy and functioning of China's Communist government. For decades, Western analysts have been too quick to overlook or dismiss the persistent influence of the Maoist heritage in contemporary China. In this book, I have argued that Maoism has been underestimated not just as a Chinese but also as a global phenomenon. I have sought to re-centre its ideas and experiences as major forces of the recent past, present and future that have shaped – and are shaping – the world, as well as China (p. 460).

Further:

We can hear echoes of Mao's own approach to international engagement in Xi's rhetoric. Mao merged appeals to international solidarity with an unflinching sense of his and China's right to world leadership, and refused to acknowledge any conflict between the two. Xi's regular invocations of 'win-win' for both China and countries hosting BARI projects similarly reject anxieties that this mega-venture might also serve as a vehicle for asserting China's national interests – for exerting an economic or political imperialism in the territories concerned (p. 464).

IV. The significance of Lovell's *Maoism: A Global History* lies in both what it achieves, and what it promises but fails to deliver. We have to give credit to Julia Lovell for asking the questions that escape others similarly engaged who can only look at that emerging giant with a mixture of greed, fear and awe. Global history is history without a centre. The theory that could form the core of global history is yet to be written. The conundrums with which Lovell closes her story should become the core agenda for the next generation of theorists. «Perhaps China's current ability to tolerate paradoxes is the most notable legacy of Mao – that dedicated admirer of contradictions». And «How will the Prc weather the contrast between the Ccp's Maoist heritage and the hybrid, globalised nature of contemporary China? How will it reconcile its expansive, internationalist rhetoric and intolerant nationalism?» (p. 465).

The research that has gone into this book is prodigious. Storytelling is Lovell's forte. The method lends admirably to the task of illustrating the moral challenge of radical

politics pitted against impossible odds, in the most difficult of terrains of the world. With her insuperable narrative skill, Lovell recounts it all in its picturesque and macabre detail. But, seen through the analytical lens of comparative theory, the cotton candy allure of the book collapses into a vague sense of discomfort, of watching an intrepid traveller who has lost her way in the jungle of metaphors, and metaphysical quests.

In the final analysis, the book which opens with a bang, closes with a whimper – and a damp squib for a conclusion: «Perhaps we should get used to the contradictions of Maoism. It looks like they will be with us for some time yet» (p. 465). From the ambition and impressive energy that has gone into this book, and the rich material it draws on, one could, perhaps, expect more by the way of a theoretical synthesis, or at least a heuristic, exploratory venture into the integration of culture, context and comparative theory and how they connect in Maoist imaginaries across the globe. The fact that so much should lead to so little in this particular sense should be a challenge and a warning to those who venture into analysis of the fungibility of post-Marxist ideology, cultural specificity, global reach and the seductive appeal of materiality in the times in which we live.

Elidor Mëhilli

The time is 17:20, on 3 February 1967, in Room Nr. 118 in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. The Cultural Revolution rages in China. Two high-level Albanian visitors meet with Mao Zedong. They explain to him how critical his revolutionary message has been for them. «Does it really play such a big role?» fires back the Chairman. «I think that you are promoting the cult of the individual». No, the visitors insist, but Mao shrugs. «I am not very capable and you know this, comrades. Just look at what kind of mess China is in».¹⁰

The mess that China was in has rightly preoccupied a generation of scholars, but Julia Lovell pertinently reminds us that the terrain where Maoism lived was a global one. It is a compelling tale of Maoism's many lives on a large scale (and therefore not surprising that so few have attempted the feat of writing it). In an era of proliferating global histories of everything – and when a growing chorus of Anglophone authors insist that the study of the global should be centered on American power and capitalism – Lovell patiently shows how Mao's China invested money, time, and labor into projecting itself abroad. Maoism had various degrees of influence from Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, and Nepal to Algeria, Ghana, Zambia and Peru, as well as among West European youths and civil rights activists in the Us. It is the kind of geographical treatment that can quickly spin

10. AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1967, Dos. 6, Fl. 12-32, traduzione di Elidor Mëhilli in *The Cold War International History Project*, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117302>.

out of control, but she does not lose sight of the balance between the vivid detail and the wider-lens panorama.

A few takeaways stand out to me. The first is the power of narrative. Mao could be pithy and bold, in addition to being surprising – as with the Albanian guests. The form of his messages mattered, even if the specifics of the anti-establishment plan could be bewildering. Many Western analysts of today's China obsess over numbers and industrial output but this obscures the importance of the narrative that China's party establishment has crafted over time. A formerly poor country making it against the odds – the ultimate rags-to-riches story, except not on American Tv series, but projected onto the international system. The emphasis on the peasant pushback in Maoism was central, but it seems to me that also important was the notion of past injury and humiliation. «Mao-ish China», the book's concluding thought, brilliantly captures the contradictions of contemporary China, where wealth amasses but there is still use for a remixed Mao. A secretive, Leninist organization, as Lovell puts it, has managed to recast itself as a market economy champion. Is that also not about the power of narrative, in addition to the economic story? If Maoism was about learning to tolerate paradoxes (cf. p. 465), we get to appreciate the tough task facing the Chinese leadership.

Secondly, a global view on Maoism offers lessons in the unintended consequences of international engagement. Lovell does not shy away from definitions but she is right that the malleability of Maoism is the point here. The problem was that this also made for varied reactions to Mao's sermons around the world. No matter how Chinese propagandists tried to win foreign hearts and minds, there was unpredictability in the process. Beijing's overtures to Africa, for example, led to exactly zero «lookalike Maoist» regimes there (p. 17). By comparison, in Nepal, India, and Peru, the local zeal was more significant though the Beijing-backed propaganda effort more muted. This is a needed contribution to the body of scholarship on Soviet soft power outside of the Soviet Union, including in the developing world, as well as to scholarship on Americanization after the Second World War. However, I wonder whether 1949 will indeed eclipse 1917 in the near future. Unlike their Soviet counterparts, as Lovell notes, China's leaders did not have a Lenin to go back to. Precisely their insistence on the Chinese characteristics of their experiments might inadvertently end up keeping the myth of Lenin alive.

Thirdly, a global history of Maoism can be a grueling exercise in contradictions. The cause of peasant-led rebellion spread like fire in the 1960s but loud proponents were often intellectuals who made a fetish out of rebelliousness. Still, Mao (and some of his followers) had a knack for projecting «chaotic inconsistency as dynamism» (p. 58). With its warlike talk, Maoism attracted «oddballs» and eccentrics «determined both to set themselves in conflict with society, and to control it» (p. 22). Page after page, West European and American self-styled radicals profess to have “understood” China's Cultural Revolution. How could they have? (It has taken long decades and painstaking scholarship

to get a deeper sense of the mess that transpired in China.) These Westerners' adoption of Maoism, Lovell tells us, says more about them than about what was happening on the ground in China. I would go a bit further: cultural appropriation, it seems, thrived among anti-capitalist radicals living under capitalism.

Such is the level of absurdity in parts of the story here that in less capable hands it could have overtaken the narrative. But it comes to us in between the horrors of Cambodia and Peru, examples of farce thus bookended by the lived reality of millions of people. Poor peasants, the book concludes, suffered the most from Mao's ideas put into action. The ultimate paradox.

Wide-ranging and stimulating, the book made me wonder how the background of the people populating its pages affected the stories they eventually told. This can be telling, after all, about how we sketch the contours of global Maoism. Former Western Maoists often wrote memoirs because they deemed their intellectual lives worth showcasing. Others did not – especially followers, especially those in poorer places with low levels of literacy. In other words, were some Maoists more self-aware of the power of narrative than others? Did they leave behind sources that have an outsize effect on our view of this era and its politics? We think of official party archives as intentionally curated (and rightly so) but this book also reveals, in my view, how some of these self-professed revolutionaries could be master curators of themselves also. Lovell mentions numerous interviews conducted over many years. (Notably, the chapter on Peru also relies on material produced by the Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación in the early 2000s.) These struck me as important points. I would like to know more about how these came about – who got to speak and why.

Miguel Ángel Urrego

Julia Lovell's book has been commented on from many points of view and several authors have recognized its merits. However, I would like to point out some problems in this brief review, especially when the book is read from Latin America, with the purpose of suggesting other possible interpretations. The first problem is that the book has a writing strategy in which the scabrous and anecdotal details have a determining weight. The presentation of the cases always begins with a strong anecdote that overshadows the deepest reflections and leads reader, who is not acquainted with the topics, to form a wrong idea of some historical processes.

When we read the chapter dedicated to Peru, the author begins with three anecdotes: the hanging of dogs, the murder with dynamite of the activist María Elena Moyano, and the anomaly of the Senderista leadership, whose action would invalidate the strategy of popular war. For this reason, the author describes to Shining Path (Sp) as a bizarre

project, outside of her time. With which the reader is lost and the central problems of a historical interpretation remain unresolved: What are the conditions of the formation of the national State in Peru that made the emergence of Sp possible? How to explain the use of such levels of violence?

The second problem of the book is that the stories about Maoism in Latin America are limited to Sp. There is no reference to the Marxist Leninist (ML) current, of great importance in the origin and development of Maoism in Latin America. In several countries the old communist parties had rectification processes, some authors call it division, which culminated in the creation of Communist Parties-ML that operated under the umbrella of Maoism for more than a decade until Albania's break with China. One of those parties, the Colombian, created an armed wing that acted for nearly two decades, the People's Liberation Army (Pla). Obviously the MLs renounced Maoism in the mid-1970s and favored Albania, but it is very important to talk about them.

On the other hand, there are no comments to other organizations or countries. If we take the case of Colombia, one of the nations in which Maoism has had the most variations and longevity, many of them in full activity today, we will observe that no political party is mentioned with its own name, and when Lovell refers to that country it is limited to an decontextualized anecdote: a guerilla «who chose whiskey over the revolution» (p. 22).

A broad consideration of Maoism in Latin America shows that the model of extreme violence, which draws Julia Lovell's attention so much, is not necessarily the most important when it comes to analyzing Maoism. Indeed, several organizations favored slogans such as «serve the people», «mass line» or the like, and developed patient, long-term working strategies with militants who abandoned their activities to live as workers and peasants. For example, the Colombian Labor Party (Clp 1970) implemented from 1972 the strategy of «barefoot» policy, which meant the movement of professional cadres to strategic places where they built with peasants: agricultural cooperatives, medical services, educational projects, etc. Only the Farc's murder of the «barefoot» from the 1980s stopped these committed militants. But something similar happened in Mexico where the meeting of Maoists and Liberation Theology gave way to the creation of the Ezln in the State of Chiapas.

Finally, it should be noted the significant importance of the Maoists in the creation of the cultural field in Latin America. In countries like Argentina, a generation of prominent intellectuals organized a large number of editorial projects, magazines, and books, and published high-impact historical and political studies. In the same way, theater and musical groups were created, they were present in workers' strikes and in electoral campaigns. So Maoism in Latin America is more than the set of bloody anecdotes about Sp.

The third problem of the book is the lack of consideration of fundamental problems derived from the presence of China and Maoism in Latin America. In effect, the

Cold War should be a central issue because: it substantially transformed the relationship between China and Cuba and between Cuba and the Maoist organizations of the world; Cuba encouraged foquismo, which was rejected by most Maoist parties; the Soviet Union imposed on Latin American Communist Parties the slogan of exclusion from the trade union and political terrain of Maoist organizations; and the Farc, a pro-Soviet and pro-Cuban organization, murdered militants of Maoist organizations. It was the aforementioned case of the persecution that the Farc carried out against the Pla and against the barefoot militants of the Clp, situation that could have turned into a civil war. But also in Peru there were armed clashes between sectors of the old Communist Party and the Senderistas. The absence of this topic in the book is due, in my opinion, to the non-consideration of other different cases than Sp and to that Lovell does not use other sources, for example the reports of the United States intelligence agencies, where is possible finding a lot information related Maoist organizations in Latin American.

In summary, it is a book that has significant contributions, which is a pioneer in considering Maoism from a global perspective. However, when we consider Latin America, it has gaps that are very problematic. Of course, we do not pretend that Julia Lovell study “all” of Latin America, which refers to all topics or countries, as it would be absurd, but it is necessary to develop a more complete picture, an introduction for example to the continent, with historical explanations of medium and long duration and with the elimination of the anecdote as the main explanatory strategy.