

## ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s Critique of Nationalist Amnesia

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One of the most perplexing contradictions of the modern times is the fact that while 20<sup>th</sup> century has been a century of increasing belief in principles of human right, democratic ideals, equality of human beings, social justice, peaceful resolution of conflict and barbarism of war, yet at the same time it has been the bloodiest century in all human history. Two world wars and various forms of genocide are among the mass brutalities which distinguish 20<sup>th</sup> century as the most savage century of human history. Such development was unpredicted by classical sociological theorists who were writing in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is amazing that typical masters of sociological theory either did not pay much attention to the question of war and peace, or were extremely optimistic about the prospects for peace in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both Comte and Spenser extensively wrote about the contrast between traditional “military” society and the modern “industrial” society.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the military type of society, they argued, industrial society engages in productive, positive, and constructive activities, and renders competition among societies through peaceful trade and commerce. Other classical theorists ignored the question of war and peace, assuming that war among nations is a matter of the past. Contrary to the popular imagination, Durkheim, Marx, and Weber rarely engaged in a direct discussion of war or peace. This incredible optimism of classic figures was partly rooted in the relative security of Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century where between the end of Napoleonic wars in 1815 and the onset of World War II in 1914 there was a relatively long stage of peace, interrupted mainly by German-French war of 1870. However, this security was a mere illusion, accompanied by increasing militarism and nationalistic identities in Europe and a vast scale of war and genocide by European powers in their pursuit of colonial conquest in Africa and other parts of the world.

Part of the answer to the paradox of 20<sup>th</sup> century must be sought in the form of modernity that was emerging in the West and the relation between modernity and war. It is in this context that both the trip and the message of ‘Abdu’l-Baha to Europe and North America during 1911-1913, take a historic significance. He travels from the East to the West to bring a message of non-violence, communication, social justice, democracy, global orientation and peace to the West. He systematically addresses the question of modernity and violence and advocates a reconstruction of both modernity and tradition for emergence of a non-violent form of rationality and modernity. In this paper I first locate the historical condition and the significance of the trip of ‘Abdu’l-Baha to the West, then briefly review the relationship between war and modernity.

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<sup>1</sup> See Comte, Auguste, 1970. *Introduction to Positive Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, and Spenser, Herbert, 1967. *Evolution of society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

The next two sections will discuss 'Abdu'l-Baha's critique of nationalism and his reconstruction of prejudice as a general theory of social constructivism. Finally I briefly discuss his positive definition of peace.

### 1. The Context of 'Abdu'l-Baha's travel to the West

'Abdu'l-Baha's travel to the West takes place in the early years of the 1910s. Historically speaking, his travel occurs at the end of a significant stage of the social history of Western society, and the beginning of a new stage. Historians usually take 1870 and 1914 as the beginning of a new historical period. Between 1870 and 1914 we witness the height of modernity, whereas 1914 represents the beginning of a slow transition to post modernity. 1870 represents the beginning of a qualitatively new and heightened stage of arms race and militarism among European societies and the rise of Germany as a new great power which threatened the hegemony of England through its massive technological advance and military buildup. However, the outcome of the World War I was the rise of a different hegemonic power in world politics, namely the United States of America. 1870 represents the rise of a qualitatively new stage of European economic interdependence and the emergence of a new order of life that is now designated as globalism.

The period between 1870 and 1914 also represents an overwhelming obsession with Darwinian concept of evolution and a fascination with a materialistic doctrine that reduced human beings to the level of nature, and applied some form of social Darwinism to international relations, race relations, gender relations, class relations, concept of crime, and other aspects of social and political reality. It is important to recognize that what is normally called social Darwinism, namely the ideology of the free liberal market, is in fact one minor expression of the general materialistic implications of a Darwinian model of struggle for existence. For example both the ideas of RealPolitik (the realist theory of international relations), and colonialism are two main expressions of the principle of a materialistic social Darwinist theory which legitimized particular forms of nationalism and national patriotism through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is no wonder that many authors of late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century glorify the cult of violence and war. It is important to remember that most of the major sociologists of the time, whose name are almost forgotten now, were supporters of a militaristic sociology which defined battle among classes, nations, and races as the main engine of all human history. Consequently they usually defended war as a cause of progress and survival of the fittest. Malesevic even proposes that classical sociological theory was dominated by the bellicose tradition. However, after the World War II, the revulsion against war brought about a reinvention of the classical tradition and turned it into a peaceful tradition. Malesevic reminds us of authors

like Gumplowicz, Ratzenhofer, Ward, Simmel, Oppenheimer, Rostow, Pareto and Mosca who presented a sociological theory that was centered in war and national conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Hegelian theory glorified war as a force of national purification and solidarity and the highest forms of morality where the individual is willing to sacrifice his life for the universal realm of society. Influenced by Hegel, a number of German philosophers extolled the absolute and unconstrained will of state, militarism, and war. The most prominent among them was Treitschke. However, the fascination with violence was widespread in Europe. Sorel's fanatical romanticization of violence in the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Lenin's categorical support of violent revolution as the only means of attaining social justice were both influential ideas among the left. Lenin's work, written during the World War I, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, saw the inevitable war among advanced capitalist societies as the last stage of capitalism which will destroy the imperialist order and ushers the age of socialism throughout the West.<sup>3</sup>

With the onset of World War I, most of the social theorists took sides with their own country. A unique case is Georg Simmel who identified war as an "absolute situation" in which ordinary and selfish preoccupations of the individuals with an impersonal money economy are replaced with an ultimate life and death situation. Thus war liberates moral impulse from the boredom of routine life, and makes individuals willing to sacrifice their lives for the good of society.<sup>4</sup> On the other side we see Durkheim who takes a strong position against Germany. Discussing Treitschke's worship of war and German superiority, Durkheim writes of a "German mentality" which led to the militaristic politics of that country.<sup>5</sup>

Side by side this cult of violence we witness the rise of an emerging peace movement in Europe and America in the early years of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The catastrophic character of senseless mass murder throughout the war gave a new energy and force to the peace movement.<sup>6</sup> At the

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<sup>2</sup> Malesevic, Sinisa, 2010. *The sociology of War and Peace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 17-49.

<sup>3</sup> Lenin, Vladimir I. , 1939. *Imperialism , the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. New York: International Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> Simmel, Georg, 1917. *Der Krieg und die Geistigen Entscheidungen*. Munich: Duncker and Humblot.

<sup>5</sup> Durkheim, Emile, 1915. *L' Allemagne Au-desus de Tout: La Mentalite Allemande et la Guerre*. Paris: Colin.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Mueller, John E., 1989. *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War*. New York: Basic Book.

time of the visit of 'Abdu'l-Baha to America peace movement was characterized by two conditions. First it was primarily an upper and upper middle class phenomenon. Secondly, and as a consequence of the first, it was usually dissociated from concerns for other forms of social reform that was going on in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America. As we will note, 'Abdu'l-Baha precisely challenged both these characteristics. While connecting to the various peace societies, he brought the message of the peace to all social groups, and consistently emphasized a positive and new conception of peace which includes principles of justice and equality at all levels of human life.

It is in this context that the voyage and the message of 'Abdu'l-Baha can be better understood. One of the main problems of a materialistic and Darwinian reduction of human beings to the level of natural struggle for existence was a Euro-centric ideology that legitimized various forms of colonial violence and violation of human rights by reducing the East to the level of nature while elevating the West to the abode of rationality and culture. Modernity in this sense was a Western phenomenon that was defined in terms of its opposition and negation of the East. Colonialism was thus the logical consequence of such approach to modernity. However, the very trip of 'Abdu'l-Baha to the West is a fundamental questioning and challenging of Euro centrism and its narrow definition of modernity. 'Abdu'l-Baha comes from the East in order to bring the message of wisdom, rationality, social justice, equal rights of men and women, collective security, racial equality, and a culture of peace to Europe and North America. Furthermore, the heart of his message was the need for a reconstruction of both the East and the West, tradition and modernity, through the unity of the East and the West and the rise of a new form of rationality and modernity that is based upon the recognition of humans as not a mere natural objects but rather as human beings, defined by spiritual characteristics like consciousness, reason and love.

We can see that the paradox of 20<sup>th</sup> century is rooted in developments that were increasingly articulated during the period 1870-1914. While the world was becoming more and more interdependent, human identities were increasingly constructed in the form of a nationalistic mythology, and international relations were progressively structured in terms of militarism and colonialism. These tendencies were understood and emphasized in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha's father, Baha'u'llah, who in 1860s wrote letters to the major political and religious leaders of the West and emphasized the emerging global character of the world, and criticized the barbarism of militarism. He argued that a true recognition of the reality of the world, namely its interdependent and organic unity, calls for the replacing of the current wasteful militaristic policies with a search for collective security and social justice. For example he wrote:

O ye the elected representatives of the people in every land! Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof, if ye be of them that scan heedfully. Regard the world as the human body which, though at its creation whole and perfect, hath been afflicted, through various causes, with grave disorders and maladies...

O kings of the earth! We see you increasing every year your expenditures, and laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is wholly and grossly unjust. Fear the sighs and tears of this Wronged One, and lay not excessive burdens on your peoples. Do not rob them to rear palaces for yourselves; nay rather choose for them that which ye choose for yourselves... By them ye rule, by their means ye subsist, by their aid ye conquer. Yet, how disdainfully ye look upon them! How strange, how very strange!

Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents. O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions. Beware lest ye disregard the counsel of the All-Knowing, the Faithful. <sup>7</sup>

Applying the spiritual message of his father to the case of Iran, ‘Abdu’l-Baha addressed in 1875 the relation between modernity and tradition in the context of Iran and criticized both the Eastern traditional approach to religion and the current Western form of materialistic and aggressive modernity. In this work, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, ‘Abdu’l-Baha called for a reconstruction of both tradition and modernity in the context of a global and peaceful understanding of the world. Although he was discussing the question of development and modernity in Iran, he argued that all societies are now part of a global context of interdependence. This means that collective security is a precondition of justice and development in any part of the world:

True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns...shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise...to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must...seek... to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant.... In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed.... In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of the others.... In this way the entire population would, first of all, be relieved of the crushing burden of expenditure currently imposed for military purposes, and secondly, great numbers of people would cease to devote their time to the continual devising of new weapons of destruction — those testimonials of greed and bloodthirstiness, so inconsistent with the gift of life — and would instead bend their efforts to the production of whatever will foster human existence and peace and well-being, and would become the cause of universal development and prosperity. <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Baha’u’llah, 2002, *Summons of the Lord of Hosts*. Haifa: Baha’I World Center, pp. 90-93.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha, 1975. *Secret of Divine Civilization*. Wilmette: Baha’I Publishing Trust, pp. 64-66.

It can be argued that the above work of 'Abdu'l-Baha together with another of his main works calling for separation of church and state in Iran, constitute a spiritual voyage of 'Abdu'l-Baha to his native land of Iran from which he was exiled when he was 9 years old. His travel to the West, after his release from Ottoman prison, takes place a few years before the World War I. This time he brings the same message of the unity of the East and the West, the need for reconstruction of both modernity and religion, the urgency of a global consciousness, and the imperative of a culture of peace to Europe and North America. His travel to the United States and Canada are particularly significant in a historical perspective. America at the beginning of the century was characterized by a paradoxical situation. On the one hand it was emerging as the new major superpower of the world; while on the other hand, it was relatively free of a history of colonialist and imperialist policies in international relations. Thus it was qualitatively different from the established pattern of European powers. It was located in a crossroad: it could listen to the message of 'Abdu'l-Baha and follow a path that distinguished it from the European past model, moving towards a form of modernity that was not militaristic, violent, and social Darwinist. Or, it could follow the exigencies of a habituated materialistic consciousness and become yet another hegemonic force of militarism and naturalistic reduction of society to the realm of a jungle. 'Abdu'l-Baha constantly emphasized the unique potentiality of America and advocated the alternative of non-violent modernity and rationality. Unfortunately, the wisdom of 'Abdu'l-Baha was not followed by either by the West or the East. The result was the 20<sup>th</sup> century paradox.

## 2. Modernity and War

War is a special case of violence which cannot be understood in isolation from other forms of violence. At the same time, war is a unique form of violence. The emphasis on the mutual interaction of war and other forms of violent conflict is one of the central contributions of sociological literature. Consequently a sociological analysis of war or peace will address questions of justice and structural violence. Thus, for example, religious fanaticism, patriarchy, racism, ideologies of national superiority, poverty, social inequality and class oppression are linked to militarism, war, and the dehumanization of the enemy. As we will see this is a central principle in 'Abdu'l-Baha's approach to modernity and violence.

However, what differentiates war from most other forms of violence is the fact that wars are highly organized forms of social conflict which are qualitatively different from ordinary forms of violence. This means that contrary to various naturalistic explanations of war which seek the source of war in the natural and instinctive aggressive tendencies of human beings, the root of war must be understood in terms of forms of culture, organization and institutions of society. In fact, human beings ordinarily abhor violence, try to avoid it, and seek alternative ways to save face without engaging in physical fight. The principal error of various macro theories of violence is that they all assume that violence comes easily to individuals. Even literature on war shows that soldiers frequently prefer to escape rather than fight, and are

intensely afraid and anxious, a fact which explains the prevalence of friendly fire.<sup>9</sup> Such a perspective is completely at odds with a neo-social Darwinist ideology which sees aggression as a biologically induced tendency among young males in order to further the reproduction of their genes.

Thus for war to take place extensive social organization is necessary in order to compel individuals to engage in military conflict and kill other human beings. As Malesevic argues human beings, left to their own devices, “are generally incapable of violence and unwilling to kill and die”. Therefore it is the “institutional trappings of the networks of organizations and ideological doctrines that make us act more violently.”<sup>10</sup> This is a key element for understanding the paradox of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Modernity represents the emergence of high degrees of social organization of violence and mass identification with nationalistic ideologies. It represents the increasing integration of state, military, technology and economy. Consequently, the history of modernity is a history of such militaristic, technological, and nationalistic integration and mobilization. As discussed by sociologists like Weber, Mann, Giddens, and Tilly, war and coercion played a crucial role in the creation of the present system of nationalism. Military competition among the European states led to the military revolution, the rise of standing army, the emergence of the conscript army, military discipline, and national integration of the populace in war industry. It was partly this bureaucratization of the army that led to the bureaucratization of other aspects of society, shaping the factory in the image of the army.<sup>11</sup> Werner Sombart argued that war between the European states was a major factor in the development of capitalism. It was the development of a standing army, and the state’s demand for military uniforms, weapons, and naval ships which created the first mass demand for economic production, leading to the development of large-scale capitalistic enterprise. Modernity, in other words, is unthinkable without its genesis in war.<sup>12</sup>

In the modern state industry, technology and war become increasingly integrated. The machine gun, the train, and the telegraph changed the nature of warfare in World War I, leading to an unprecedented degree of brutality and murder in that war. However, it was the development of airplanes that helped people to forget the senselessness of war that was experienced during the

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<sup>9</sup> Collins, Randall, 2008. *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University press.

<sup>10</sup> Malesevic, Sinisa, 2010. P. 117.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Giddens, Anthony, 1985. *The Nation-State and Violence*. Cambridge: polity press, and Mann, Michael, 1988. *States, War and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>12</sup> Sombart, Werner, 1913. *Krieg und Kapitalismus*. Munchen: Duncker and Humblot.

World War I, and to see individual bravery and adventure in the air warfare. Airplanes and more sophisticated weapons brought about new scales of barbarism during the World War II. Finally, the introduction of high tech/nuclear weapon in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has transformed the nature of modern warfare.<sup>13</sup> Equally important was the rise of nationalistic ideologies which integrated the masses into militarism. Sociologists and military historians see Napoleon's introduction of ideological mass mobilization of the citizens into militarism as a major turning point in the emergence of modernity. Unlike the past that soldiers were hired soldiers with little nationalistic loyalties and identifications, Napoleon brought propaganda and revolutionary zeal to the art of death and militarism, replacing the old army with a conscript citizen army. Nationalism increasingly became the most powerful determinant of identity in modern world, replacing religion as the center of the mobilization of emotions.

The paradox of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can therefore be partly explained by the destructive character of recent military technology, the rise of popular nationalism, the justification of violence by an instrumental ethics which legitimizes any means in terms of the morality of the end, and the integration of industry and the military. This is partly compatible with C. Wright Mill's famous thesis of the military-industrial complex where the complex unity of military and industrial enterprises creates conditions that are conducive to war.<sup>14</sup> As we will see throughout the next sections, 'Abdu'l-Baha systematically addressed all these questions and call for a new approach to modernity.

### 3. 'Abdu'l-Baha's Critique of Nationalist Amnesia

'Abdu'l-Baha came to the West to advocate a new form of identity and social organization that is based on the recognition of a universalistic and global orientation. As we have seen, however, nationalistic ideology defines patriotism in terms of the opposition to other nations. Thus the basis of internal solidarity becomes estrangement, indifference, and enmity towards the outsiders. Historically speaking, however, nationalism is only a modern and historically-specific form of political and cultural identity. In most periods of history, identities were defined in local ways, and the empires had only rudimentary control of their outlying territories. The Modern state as Max Weber defines it came into existence through expropriation of the means of coercion from the local groups and forging a monopoly of their control in the hands of state machinery. That meant emergence of standing army, centralized political control, and increasing communication and integration within the territory controlled by the state.<sup>15</sup> That is why Giddens defines modernity in terms of the twin processes of surveillance and war. In

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<sup>13</sup> See Lawrence, Philip K., 1997. *Modernity and War: The Creed of Absolute Violence*. New York; St. Martin's Press.

<sup>14</sup> Mills, C. Wright, 1956. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Weber, Max, 1968. *Economy and Society Vol. I*. New York: Bedminster Press.

other words, in the context of both capitalism and industrialism, the modern state creates effective control and surveillance of the population within the national border and provides domestic order for the citizens in exchange for their willingness to participate in war with other states.<sup>16</sup> Many sociologists have argued that provision of welfare rights and services through state is part of the transaction between state and citizens to be willing to kill and die for their nation.

We can see that nationalism is neither an old social institution nor a natural order of reality. As Anderson argues, nationalism is an invented tradition, which is product of a constructed imagined community.<sup>17</sup> But the strength of the nationalist ideology is precisely in forgetting this arbitrary and invented character of nationalism. On the contrary, for nationalist ideology to be an effective means of mobilization of prejudice, solidarity, and violence it is necessary that people define their national border and culture as a naturalistic primordial reality which is rooted in the nature of things. In other words, nationalism becomes an essentialist category that represents a natural essence endowed with its own soul and life, individuality and unity that extends throughout time and history. It is no wonder that the height of the nationalist ideology was accompanied with the rise of the romantic notion of state as an organic entity. Defining state in organic ways implied that nations are qualitatively different from each other, have their own persistence and soul throughout history, and cannot be judged in terms of any universalistic moral criterion.

It is interesting that at that same time Baha'u'llah also uses an organic metaphor to describe society. In his addresses to the leaders of the world he asks them to regard the world as one human body. However, Baha'u'llah uses the organic metaphor to describe the world of humanity. His statement is rather a rejection of the romantic notion of nationalism and replacing it with the new idea that all human societies, all cultures, and all nations are in an objective state of interdependence and parts of a global common system. Baha'u'llah uses the metaphor used by advocates of nationalist ideology in order to effectively undermine the entire nationalist illusion.

'Abdu'l-Baha's talks in Europe and North America take this critique of nationalist ideology to unprecedented new levels of complexity. It is one of the characteristics of his talks that he speaks in ways that are accessible to everyone and yet his message is highly complex and layered. Three principles are frequently emphasized by 'Abdu'l-Baha's talks with regard to nationalist and patriotic ideologies. First, he emphasizes the arbitrary and invented character of all national boundaries and ideologies. Nationalism is therefore not a primordial entity but rather a socially constructed arbitrary prejudice. Secondly, he argues that nationalism is usually a

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<sup>16</sup> Giddens, Anthony, 1985.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, Benedict R. O'G., 1983. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.

product of violence, murder, coercion, and injustice. It is war, plunder, the force of the sword, and brutality that have acted as the main agents of demarcation of national and political categories throughout human history. Thirdly, nationalist ideology is based upon a confused and immoral distinction between the hero and the murderer. In reality, 'Abdu'l-Baha says national heroes are usually the greatest murderer and criminals. We can see that 'Abdu'l-Baha is engaged in a systematic critique of nationalist amnesia. His talks were intended to fight against this collective unconscious identity and to bring the light of reason, consciousness and hence intersubjectivity to the realm of culture and society.

Discussing the arbitrary nature of nationalist ideology, 'Abdu'l-Baha frequently argues that national borders have no ground in nature and are products of arbitrary distinctions and illusions. For example he states:

Consider the prejudice of patriotism. This is one globe, one land, one country. God did not divide it into national boundaries. He created all the continents without national divisions. Why should we make such division ourselves? These are but imaginary lines and boundaries. Europe is a continent; it is not naturally divided; man has drawn the lines and established the limits of kingdoms and empires. Man declares a river to be a boundary line between two countries, calling this side French and the other side German, whereas the river was created for both and is a natural artery for all. Is it not imagination and ignorance which impels man to violate the divine intention and make the very bounties of God the cause of war, bloodshed and destruction? Therefore, all prejudices between man and man are falsehoods and violations of the will of God. God desires unity and love; He commands harmony and fellowship. Enmity is human disobedience; God Himself is love.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, he refers to often made equation of nationality, race and ethnicity and argues that all human beings are just one human race:

In the creative plan there is no racial distinction and separation such as Frenchman, Englishman, American, German, Italian or Spaniard; all belong to one household. These boundaries and distinctions are human and artificial, not natural and original. All mankind are the fruits of one tree, flowers of the same garden, waves of one sea. In the animal kingdom no such distinction and separation are observed. The sheep of the East and the sheep of the West would associate peacefully. The Oriental flock would not look surprised as if saying, "These are sheep of the Occident; they do not belong to our country." All would gather in harmony and enjoy the same pasture without evidence of local or racial distinction. The birds of different countries mingle in friendliness. We find these virtues in the animal kingdom. Shall man deprive himself of these virtues?

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<sup>18</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha, 1982. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Baha during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, pp. 299-300.

Man is endowed with superior reasoning power and the faculty of perception; he is the manifestation of divine bestowals. Shall racial ideas prevail and obscure the creative purpose of unity in his kingdom? Shall he say, "I am a German," "I am a Frenchman" or an "Englishman" and declare war because of this imaginary and human distinction? God forbid! This earth is one household and the native land of all humanity; therefore, the human race should ignore distinctions and boundaries which are artificial and conducive to disagreement and hostility.<sup>19</sup>

The second point noted by 'Abdu'l-Baha is that not only nationalistic distinctions are arbitrary and invented, they are inventions of particularistic interests, the force of coercion, murder and brutality. In other words, nationalist identities are forms of unconscious that are rooted in the law of jungle and not a law of morality or human rights. If people of the world become conscious of the fact that their borders are products of genocide, war, conquest and brute force, they would be more likely to look at other people and nations as human beings, feel solidarity with the entire humanity, regard the interests and needs of other people as equally legitimate and develop the habit of putting themselves in the shoes of the others. Nationalistic fetish, however, prevents us from seeking the universal interests of human race. Instead, it teaches us to consider our needs as a moral imperative, while the needs of others are entirely ignored through a process of objectification and othering of the outsiders. For example he states:

Why, then, all these fallacious national and racial distinctions? These boundary lines and artificial barriers have been created by despots and conquerors who sought to attain dominion over mankind, thereby engendering patriotic feeling and rousing selfish devotion to merely local standards of government. As a rule they themselves enjoyed luxuries in palaces, surrounded by conditions of ease and affluence, while armies of soldiers, civilians and tillers of the soil fought and died at their command upon the field of battle, shedding their innocent blood for a delusion such as "we are Germans," "our enemies are French," etc., when, in reality, all are humankind, all belong to the one family and posterity of Adam, the original father. This prejudice or limited patriotism is prevalent throughout the world, while man is blind to patriotism in the larger sense which includes all races and native lands. From every real standpoint there must and should be peace among all nations...

After all, a claim and title to territory or native land is but a claim and attachment to the dust of earth. We live upon this earth for a few days and then rest beneath it forever. So it is our graveyard eternally. Shall man fight for the tomb which devours him, for his eternal sepulcher? What ignorance could be greater than this? To fight over his grave, to kill another for his grave! What heedlessness! What a delusion!<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 118.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 354-55.

Therefore, nationalistic amnesia serves the particularistic interests of the despots and tyrants who use the innocent people of the world to pursue their particularistic interests. The universal interests of humanity are realized through a universal form of patriotism, when the sign of patriotic faith is the degree of the commitment of the citizens to conditions of peace, prosperity and justice for the entire human race. This universal patriotism is a devotion to the unity in diversity. He again says:

Consider what is happening in Tripoli: how the poor are being killed and the blood of the helpless is being shed upon both sides; children, made fatherless; fathers, lamenting the death of their sons; mothers, bewailing the loss of dear ones. And what is the benefit after all? Nothing conceivable. Is it, therefore, justifiable?... Therefore, it is evident that warfare, cruelty and bloodshed in the kingdom of man are caused by human greed, hatred and selfishness. The kings and rulers of nations enjoy luxury and ease in their palaces and send the common people to the battlefield--offer them as the food and targets of cannon. Each day they invent new instruments for the more complete destruction of the foundations of the human race. They are callous and merciless toward their fellow creatures. What shall atone for the sufferings and grief of mothers who have so tenderly cared for their sons? What sleepless nights they have spent, and what days of devotion and love they have given to bring their children to maturity! Yet the savagery of these warring rulers causes great numbers of their victims to be torn and mutilated in a day.<sup>21</sup>

The third criticism of nationalistic particularism in the talks of 'Abdu'l-Baha concerns the myth of national heroism. It is one of the foundational characteristics of any nationalist ideology to celebrate its identity in terms of heroism of specific national heroes. In fact the very idea of nationalism is inseparable from the idea of national honor reflected in the historic acts of national heroes. As Veblen correctly understood, patriotism is a grand form of invidious comparison and competition for exclusive or superior claim to honor. Writing during the World War I, Veblen applied his theory of pecuniary emulation to the question of international relations. In His analysis of the leisure class, he argued that both wasteful conspicuous consumption and leisure become the mark of success in pecuniary emulation. However, this same process of emulation is the basis of the claims for national honor and patriotism. According to Veblen patriotism is "a sense of partisan solidarity in respect of prestige" for "the patriotic spirit is a spirit of emulation".<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Veblen believed that no permanent peace is possible as long as these patriotic habits of thought are not transformed in more peaceful ways.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>22</sup> Veblen, Thorstein, 1998. *The Nature of Peace*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, pp. 31-33.

The nationalist construction of hero is always a binary category which is defined in its opposition to the criminal. The distinction between criminal murderer and military hero is at the heart of definition of national imagination. The problem with this construct is that the heroes of one nation are the criminals of the other. Chengiz Khan and Alexander the Great are the ultimate criminals for Iranian national imagination. But they are the ultimate heroes of Greek and Mongolian history. The reason for this opposition is the particularistic double standard of nationalist morality and its reduction of the outsiders to the realm of nature and natural objects. Consequently, the morality of hero worship becomes itself a main source of the culture of violence.

It is here that ‘Abdu’l-Baha engages in a radical redefinition of the concept of hero. Heroes are those who serve the universal interests of human race. His father already has reinterpreted the very idea of honor in this world-embracing manner. He frequently emphasized that honor and glory is for one who loves the entire human race:

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being... hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.<sup>23</sup>

According to ‘Abdu’l-Baha, it is one of the greatest ironies of nationalistic consciousness that elevates the military criminal to the level of a hero. But the entire distinction is baseless. Military mass murderers and plunderers are exceedingly worse than ordinary murderers and thieves. For example he says:

Consider the ignorance and inconsistency of the human race. If a man kills another, no matter what the cause may be, he is pronounced a murderer, imprisoned or executed; but the brutal oppressor who has slain one hundred thousand is idolized as a hero, conqueror or military genius. A man steals a small sum of money; he is called a thief and sent to the penitentiary; but the military leader who invades and pillages a whole kingdom is acclaimed heroic and a mighty man of valor. How base and ignorant is man!<sup>24</sup>

This insight becomes even more relevant when we apply ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s logic to the present situation. This is related to the idea of total war and it has taken a new meaning in the context of distinction between the old and the new wars. Most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wars were apparently examples of the old type of war. But many of the recent conflicts associated with the

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<sup>23</sup> Baha’u’llah, 1988. Tablets of Baha’u’llah Revealed after the Kitabi-i-Aqdas. Wilmette: Baha’i Publishing trust, p. 167.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha, 1982, p. 119.

“failed states” represent a new type of war. The recent global developments have partly triggered the rise of new wars and global uncivil societies. According to Kaldor, new wars are qualitatively different from the old wars. The aim of new war is usually extermination or mass expulsion of the other, whereas in the old war the aim was securing geopolitical control. New war is frequently based on identity politics, and therefore the other must be eliminated. The means utilized by old war were a centralized professional military. New war uses gangs of decentralized warlords and criminal groups, even child soldiers, for murder. The basis of finance of old war was the state treasury and taxation, whereas its base in new war is criminal enterprise as well as the financial support of sympathetic people in other parts of the world. New wars are usually associated with failed states unable to have any meaningful control of the means of coercion in their territory. This is influenced by both the end of the cold war and globalization of economic competition.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the consensus that emerges from the contrast between the old and the new wars is the idea that in new wars presumed heroes are nothing but criminals, whereas in the old wars heroes were qualitatively distinct from the murderers. However, this distinction is based on the idea that the new wars make no distinction between the civilian and military personnel and engages in systematic and abhorring violence against the civilians. In this sense, the nationalistic ideology tries to calm its own conscience by defining its own traditional heroes as heroic and moral. This escapist strategy is doomed to failure. It is true that modernity distinguished itself from the traditional theory that justified enslavement and murder of the defeated people. Following the example of authors like Rousseau, modernity spoke of the inalienable rights of the people including the vanquished nations, and thus condemned the violence against the civilians. However, in reality 20<sup>th</sup> century was the age of total and absolute wars, wars in which the distinction between civilian and military was increasingly obliterated. In spite of modern agreements to confine war to the military sector and protect civilians from military violence, the World Wars recognized the mutual dependence and integration of military and industrial sectors of society and therefore systematically targeted the economic and industrial infrastructure of the enemy in order to win the war. 20<sup>th</sup> century became the century of total war and the erosion of the distinction between the soldier and the civilian. In other words, contrary to the popular myth, the new war is a more crude extension of the old type of war engaged by modernity. The wars of premodernity recognized no human or natural rights for the defeated enemy. The heroes of the past were usually initiators of mass murder and enslavement. But modernity recognized formal rights for all people and tried to make war subject to the rules of morality. But it was the very organic relation between the modernity and war, and the inseparable connection of capitalism and nationalism that led to the opposite conclusion. Yet the civilian destruction can take place

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<sup>25</sup> Kaldor, Mary, 1999. *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

with indifferent callousness, as an enterprise of spectacle war, from distance and without ferociousness. This rationalization of violence conceals its catastrophic escalation.

In unveiling the follies of nationalistic dehumanization of others, in one of his talks in Paris, 'Abdu'l-Baha notes the moral hypocrisy of all nationalistic particularism by the reaction of the French to death of the French and non-French victims of calamity:

I have just been told that there has been a terrible accident in this country. A train has fallen into the river and at least twenty people have been killed. This is going to be a matter for discussion in the French Parliament today... I am filled with wonder and surprise to notice what interest and excitement has been aroused throughout the whole country on account of the death of twenty people, while they remain cold and indifferent to the fact that thousands of Italians, Turks, and Arabs are killed in Tripoli! The horror of this wholesale slaughter has not disturbed the Government at all! Yet these unfortunate people are human beings too.

Why is there so much interest and eager sympathy shown towards these twenty individuals, while for five thousand persons there is none? They are all men, they all belong to the family of mankind, but they are of other lands and races. It is no concern of the disinterested countries if these men are cut to pieces, this wholesale slaughter does not affect them! How unjust, how cruel is this, how utterly devoid of any good and true feeling! The people of these other lands have children and wives, mothers, daughters, and little sons! In these countries today there is hardly a house free from the sound of bitter weeping, scarcely can one find a home untouched by the cruel hand of war.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. Critique of Prejudice as Social Constructivism

However, in the same way that both the old and new wars, corresponding to modernity and tradition, affirm a common principle of violence, both Western modernity and Eastern traditionalism were perceived by 'Abdu'l-Baha as the expressions of a common reduction of human beings to the realm of nature, jungle, objects, and static essences. Consequently, for 'Abdu'l-Baha the root of all violence and particularistic identities is the reduction of humans to the level of nature, objects, and animals. This dehumanization underlies both religious traditionalism of the East and the materialist modernity of the West.

We can begin this discussion by referring to ancient symbols of the birth of the human being, namely sphinx. This enigmatic symbol has been interpreted in various ways. But from a dialectical perspective, the sphinx represents the meaning and purpose of human history. The

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<sup>26</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha, 1972. Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Baha in 1911. London; U.K. Baha'i Publishing Trust, Pp. 114-15.

sphinx denotes a being whose body is an animal while his face is human. In other words, the purpose of history is the emergence of the human being out of the realm of nature.<sup>27</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s logic is simple and penetrating. Wars are fought for the pursuits of national interests, but such rationality is structured within a world of naturalistic irrationality. The irrational institutions create a condition in which mutual destruction and enmity appears as rational strategies.

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s approach to modernity is unique. In both ordinary and academic understandings of modernity, it is the fundamental opposition between traditionalism and modernity that defines both categories. As a matter of fact, each system partly justifies itself in terms of critique of the other. Western modernity, for example, points to the abhorring forms of violence and terrorism committed in the name of Islam and extols the virtues of civilized modernity. Conversely, the entrepreneurs of death justify all kinds of violence and religious fanaticism by identifying modernity with colonialism, racism, and imperialistic wars. However, for ‘Abdu’l-Baha both Eastern religious fanaticism and the Western materialist modernity suffer from a common worldview which is the reduction of human beings to the realm of nature, objects, and animals. From the point of view of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, both materialistic modernity and traditional religiosity are different expressions of a worldview of dehumanization of humans. History, therefore, has been largely dominated by this naturalistic reduction of human beings to the realm of jungle, objects, and animals. The naturalistic and reductionist aspect of western modernity is manifest in its imbalance between instrumental rationality and moral/spiritual maturity, its history of colonialism, war, consumerism, narcissistic obsession with body, destruction of the environment, extreme of inequality among classes and nations, patriarchy and racism. These are various forms of the reflection of a social application of the Darwinian principle of struggle for existence.

However, religious traditionalism has in fact been mostly a tradition of dehumanization and de-spiritualization of human beings. Religious traditionalism has been primarily a strategy of turning humans into strangers and enemies of each other, legitimizing slavery of unbelievers, violence and discrimination against women, and discrimination regarding the rights of humans in terms of their religious identification. Existing religions have frequently become a breeding ground for hate, violence, discrimination, and estrangement. Members of religious groups frequently find each other dirty, ritually impure and polluted, avoid communication and friendship with other religious groups, and legitimize discrimination, censorship, and patriarchy. In one word, a main function of traditionalistic religions has become the reduction of the human reality to the level of nature, where struggle for existence rules, where hatred and violence is a

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Hegel, G. W. 1956. *The Philosophy of History*. New York: Dover publishers, p. 199.

divinely sanctioned virtue, where other human beings are strangers and enemies who should be subjugated, silenced, even forced to extinction.

This is perhaps the most perplexing phenomenon of religious history. The purpose of religion is to curb the natural and violent aspect of human nature and encourage humans to turn towards their spiritual truth where one can see all others as spiritual beings, as mirrors of God, as sacred and beautiful, and as endowed with equal rights. Yet in the name of God and spiritual dedication the vilest and most sadistic, ignorant, and particularistic aspects of our low nature have been encouraged. One extreme form of this religious dehumanization is the law of apostasy (*irtidád*). The law of apostasy was practiced in medieval times by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike but is nowadays confined to some of the countries that call themselves Islamic. According to this law if one is born in a Muslim family and then decides to change his religion he or she should be killed. In other words, using one's reason and consciousness becomes the ultimate crime that is punishable by death. Religion is degraded into a naturalistic and physical quality. Not only is freedom of conscience not recognized, but it becomes the ultimate sin. The law of apostasy turns humans into natural objects, dehumanizes them, and becomes a violent rejection of the dignity of self-determination of humans through the exercise of their own reason. In the name of God and spirituality we witness the ultimate de-spiritualization and dehumanization of humans.

Consequently for 'Abdu'l-Baha the problem of violence is rooted in the naturalistic reduction of humans prevalent both within Western modernity and Eastern religious traditionalism. It is for this reason that peace, human rights, and the birth of humans as humans require a reconstruction of both modernity and religion. Both Western modernity and Eastern religious traditionalism contain sublime moral and spiritual principles. But they both should be reinterpreted through a worldview of universalism and humanization. For 'Abdu'l-Baha, this is the imperative of the unity of the East and the West in a new culture of love and communication. But this culture is neither a materialistic and object-centered culture, nor a traditional ghost-centered conception of reality. What is needed is a new form of spirituality which is an intersubjective-centered orientation.

According to 'Abdu'l-Baha the true message of all religions has been a rejection of the naturalistic reduction of humans to the level of nature, affirming the cultural and intersubjective character of human reality. Followers of the past religions usually did not understand the truth of their own scriptures and thus turned religion into an instrument of dehumanization. It is time now to discover the common truth of all religions and find out that true spiritual definition of humanity supports the modern principles of human rights and equality. All forms of oppression are products of the reduction of humans to the realm of nature. Patriarchy is the worldview that reduces the rights and values of humans to the level of biology. Racism and slavery reduces humans to the level of objects and physical appearance. Caste system reduces the rights of humans to the family of birth. Nationalism reduces the rights and values of people to their place of birth, and apostasy reduces spirit and religion to the level of birth blood. In his talk in Chicago,

‘Abdu’l-Baha addressed the fundamental contradiction between racism and the biblical definition of all human beings as made in the image of God:

According to the words of the Old Testament God has said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” This indicates that man is of the image and likeness of God . . . . Let us now discover more specifically how he is the image and likeness of God and what is the standard or criterion by which he can be measured and estimated. This standard can be no other than the divine virtues which are revealed in him. . . . Can we apply the test of racial color and say that man of a certain hue—white, black, brown, yellow, red—is the true image of his Creator? We must conclude that color is not the standard and estimate of judgment and that it is of no importance, for color is accidental in nature. The spirit and intelligence of man is essential, and that is the manifestation of divine virtues, the merciful bestowals of God, the eternal life and baptism through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, be it known that color or race is of no importance. . . . Man is not man simply because of bodily attributes. The standard of divine measure and judgment is his intelligence and spirit.<sup>28</sup>

Here is an example of a new spiritualism which finds a spiritual definition of human beings as citizens of the kingdom of God as the basis of affirming the principles of universal human rights, the oneness of humanity, social justice, and world peace. The key here is ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s argument that a culture of peace is a culture of liberation from the bondage of the naturalistic struggle for existence and entry into the realm of universal interdependence, reciprocity, harmony and love. For example he writes:

And among the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh is man's freedom, that through the ideal Power he should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature; for as long as man is captive to nature he is a ferocious animal, as the struggle for existence is one of the exigencies of the world of nature. This matter of the struggle for existence is the fountain-head of all calamities and is the supreme affliction.<sup>29</sup> (*Selections* 316)

In the above passage ‘Abdu’l-Baha is offering a new conception of freedom. Freedom is the same as humanization, which is the movement from natural necessity to cultural intersubjectivity and rational self determination. According to ‘Abdu’l-Baha technical and scientific reason help us liberate from the bondage of external nature. He frequently mentions in his talks that human being is qualitatively different from other beings because through the use of reason and consciousness, humans discover the laws of nature and hence control and defy them. In other words, science and rationality are means of liberation from natural necessity. However, for ‘Abdu’l-Baha this is not the sufficient condition for attaining freedom. Western materialistic

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha, 1982, p. 70.

<sup>29</sup> Abdu’l-Baha, 1978. *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*. Haifa: Baha’l World center, p. 316.

modernity has provided amazing advances in scientific and technical rationality but it has not been adequately successful in realizing human liberation. The key point is that in addition to external nature, humans must be liberated from the internal control of nature as well. But internal bondage to nature means enslavement to a form of life that is governed by social Darwinism, reduction of life to material and physical impulses and pleasures, and imprisonment in a worldview of appearances which finds individual consciousness as a self enclosed and isolated selfish enterprise. Therefore, realization of true freedom is dependent on living a life of culture, spirit, and reason where the unity in diversity of all forms of life, the oneness of humanity as spiritual beings who are all sacred and beautiful is the supreme reality. That is liberation from the captivity of nature.

The ironic point is that this liberation from nature is the precondition of realization of the truth of nature as a system of unity in diversity and universal interdependence and harmony. In this way protection of the environment and respect for all forms of life become the logical consequence of liberation from nature. On the contrary when humans imitate the norm of animal existence and live by the principle of struggle for existence they will destroy both the environment and themselves. Given the immense potential for destruction that is implied in technical reason, a selfish and self-seeking human life will destroy the planet.

We can now address one of the most penetrating and insightful points that are raised by ‘Abdu’l-Baha in his talks. Nationalistic violence is destructive of life because it is a form of prejudice and particularism. Therefore, ‘Abdu’l-Baha engages in a foundational critique of all forms of prejudice and identifies them as the root of violence. In a number of passages and talks ‘Abdu’l-Baha argued that the naturalistic principle of struggle for existence in human life is none other than prejudice. Therefore, not only prejudice is the cause of war and destruction, it is also the ultimate form of dehumanization and bondage to nature. Realization of true freedom, therefore, is dependent on emancipation from the trappings of various forms of prejudice and moving towards a worldview, sentiment, and behavioral orientation that is based upon the principle of unity in diversity. For example he states:

And among the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh is that religious, racial, political, economic and patriotic prejudices destroy the edifice of humanity. As long as these prejudices prevail, the world of humanity will not have rest. For a period of 6,000 years history informs us about the world of humanity. During these 6,000 years the world of humanity has not been free from war, strife, murder and bloodthirstiness. In every period war has been waged in one country or another and that war was due to religious prejudice, racial prejudice, political prejudice or patriotic prejudice. It has therefore been ascertained and proved that all prejudices are destructive of the human edifice. As long as these prejudices persist, the struggle for existence must remain dominant, and bloodthirstiness and rapacity continue. Therefore, even as was the case in the past, the world of humanity cannot be saved from the darkness of nature and cannot attain

illumination except through the abandonment of prejudices and the acquisition of the morals of the Kingdom.<sup>30</sup>

By reading various statements of ‘Abdu’l-Baha about prejudice and its relation to violence we witness that he turns his critique of prejudice to a universal critique of naturalistic and essentialist worldview that reduces social traditions, institutions and habits to a reified, unchanging, material, and object-like structure. For ‘Abdu’l-Baha, however, all these habits and institutions are products of an arbitrary reduction of humanity to the realm of nature and objects. They are all forms of mental and social construction that have no true reality or natural character. Our institutions are reflections of our unconscious habits and assumptions. What is real, however, is the truth of humanity as an intersubjective unity in diversity, an interdependent system of consciousness and spirit.

But all particularistic forms of love which define themselves in opposition and negation of the others are arbitrary constructs of human consciousness, constructions that are ultimately unconscious because they are not in accordance with the true reality of human beings as intersubjective, historical, communicative, and interdependent spiritual forms of life. Critique of the arbitrary character of nationalistic habits of mind is just one instance of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s general critique of prejudice as arbitrary and unconscious forms of social constructivism. The innovative and creative message of ‘Abdu’l-Baha when Darwinist and materialistic doctrines were so popular and there was no sociological theory called social constructivism is indeed amazing.

##### 5. Towards a Positive Definition of Peace

After the World War II and the rise of peace studies as a scholarly object of analysis, authors like Galtung suggested a distinction between negative and positive definitions of peace.<sup>31</sup> These authors argued that true peace is a positive peace and that negative peace is both unstable and illusory. Therefore the preference for a positive definition of peace was at the same time a vision of a different theory of peace. In negative definition of peace, war is a positive and objective reality, while peace is simply a negative category which refers to the absence of war and conflict, a cessation of armed battles. In positive definition of peace, on the other hand, peace is an objective state of social reality that is defined by a form of reciprocal and harmonious relations that foster mutual development and communication among the individuals and groups. In this sense, war and violence is the absence of positive peace. This means that even when there is no direct coercion and armed conflict we may still be in a state of war and aggression.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 313.

<sup>31</sup> Galtung, Johan, 1996. *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute.

Concepts like structural, symbolic, and cultural violence are few expressions of this new conception of positive definition of peace.

It is interesting to note, however, that it was ‘Abdu’l-Baha who systematically and in many of his lectures and writings advocated a unique positive definition of peace. In order to better understand this point we can examine the ironic beginning of his letter to the Central Organization for Durable Peace, Hague. In this letter that is written in 1919, after the end of the World War I, ‘Abdu’l-Baha mentions an apparently contradictory point:

This recent war has proved to the world and the people that war is destruction while universal peace is construction; war is death while peace is life;... war is the struggle for existence while peace is mutual aid and co-operation among the peoples of the world and the cause of the good pleasure of the True One in the heavenly realm. There is not one soul whose conscience does not testify that in this day there is no more important matter in the world than that of universal peace. .. But the wise souls who are aware of the essential relationships emanating from the realities of things consider that one single matter cannot, by itself, influence the human reality as it ought and should, for until the minds of men become united, no important matter can be accomplished. At present universal peace is a matter of great importance, but unity of conscience is essential, so that the foundation of this matter may become secure, its establishment firm and its edifice strong.<sup>32</sup>

In the above passage ‘Abdu’l-Baha first testifies that all human beings have come to the conclusion that war is evil and peace is good. But then he says that this is not sufficient since realization of peace requires the attainment of unity of conscience about peace. The key for understanding this apparent contradiction is his reference to the fact that “one single matter cannot, by itself, influence the human reality as it ought and should”. In other words, what ‘Abdu’l-Baha is saying is that although humanity at the end of the World War I has reached consensus on the utility of peace, it has not yet reached consensus on the truth of peace. For peace to happen it is not simply enough that people would say war is bad, instead they should become united in understanding of the idea of peace. That idea, however, is not a uni-dimensional concept, rather it is a multidimensional notion. The rest of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s letter is a discussion of the actual content of the complex idea of peace. When humanity reaches agreement and unity of conscience with regard to those issues, it has reached real consensus on the necessity of peace.

In other words, ‘Abdu’l-Baha is stating that humanity at this time has come to a consensus in believing in the utility of negative peace. However, this is not effective because what is needed is realization of agreement on positive peace. In the rest of his letter, ‘Abdu’l-

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<sup>32</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha, 1978, Selections, p.

Baha reaffirms the essence of his previous lectures in the West. Peace requires social justice, overcoming of patriarchy, rejection of traditionalism and embracing independent investigation of truth, elimination of all prejudices, a spiritual definition of human reality, the harmony between material civilization and moral/spiritual civilization, and a commitment to the principles of the oneness of humanity, collective security, and global peace. In addition we need a reconstruction of religion so that religion becomes a cause of love and unity among all human beings, which reconciles religion and reason, and defines religion as a dynamic and historically-specific reality. These are essential conditions and definitions of peace.

While in this paper we cannot address the details of 'Abdu'l-Baha's complex approach to his positive definition of peace we can conclude that behind all these ideas and principles there lies a common vision of human beings as an intersubjective, communicative, and interdependent community of spirit. Love is the supreme principle of life, and it is love that is the ultimate animating principle of human reality. Attainment of collective self consciousness by human species is the attainment of peace and the end of hitherto self-estrangement of humanity. This is the true meaning of the enlightenment.