

Global Citizenship and Humanities Scholarship

Toward a Twenty-First Century Agenda

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Abstract

At the opening of the twenty-first century, when humanity is struggling to come to terms with the exigencies of global interdependence, the critique and deconstruction of anachronistic social constructs is a necessary but insufficient undertaking in the humanities. The humanities will remain relevant to the extent that humanities scholars also articulate constructive insights regarding how to approach globalization in a just, sustainable, and humane manner. Toward this end, much can be learned from naturally occurring, yet widely overlooked, experiments with global integration and global citizenship. This paper presents a case study of the international Bahá'í community in order to illustrate such an approach, and to invite engaged dialogue between constructive and deconstructive analytical approaches in the humanities.

Keywords: Global citizenship, Globalization, Global interdependence, Humanities agenda, Case study

In the latter half of the twentieth century, humanities scholarship was increasingly focused on the critique and deconstruction of inherited social norms and institutions, based on the social injustices embedded in them. This *social injustice paradigm* in the humanities paralleled, in many ways, the *pathology paradigm* that came to dominate disciplines such as medicine and psychology. Within the pathology paradigm, doctors and psychologists have been preoccupied with reacting to illness and disease rather than promoting constructive models of health, wellness, and prevention. Likewise, within the social injustice paradigm, humanities scholars have been preoccupied with reacting to social oppression and inequity rather than examining constructive models of social justice and sustainability.

In medicine and psychology, alternatives to the pathology paradigm are now emerging, or in some cases re-emerging after decades of neglect, to correct this imbalance. Many medical researchers and physicians are beginning to pay more attention to nutrition, physical fitness, and other positive health and lifestyle variables. They are also gradually becoming more receptive to “alternative” and “complementary” health care practices. Similarly, a movement known as *positive psychology* is gaining ground among psychologists who are recognizing the limitations of merely treating mental illness in a reactive mode. The goal of positive psychology is to find or develop models that promote mental health in proactive and systematic ways (refer, for example, to Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Seligman, 2003).

In the humanities, we would do well to address the imbalance created by our own recent pre-occupation with the social injustice paradigm. Granted, as long

as social injustices exist, social critique will remain a valid and important activity. The intent of this paper is not to belittle or diminish this important undertaking, but to suggest that critique is insufficient by itself. Critique tells us only what *is not* working. It does not tell us what *is* working and what we might learn from it.

Currently, critiques of market-dominated globalization and Western global hegemony fill the pages of academic books and journals. But where can one turn for a critically-informed yet constructive vision of a just and sustainable world order? Perhaps we would benefit from the systematic analysis and observation of communities and movements who have embraced alternative visions of globalization and are working toward mature and humane models of world citizenship. This is the contribution of this paper: to provide an analysis of one constructive model of global citizenship, and to invite others to engage in similar contributions, in order to begin filling an important gap in the literature on globalization.

Case Study: The International Bahá'í Community

There are, of course, many alternative models of globalization and world citizenship that we might examine. These have been articulated by peace movements, environmental movements, labor unions, world federalist organizations, and many other groups. One of the oldest, most well-established, and most globally dispersed models available for analysis is the international Bahá'í community, which was founded on a vision of global interdependence and world citizenship over

one hundred and fifty years ago, long before the concept of globalization had any meaning in popular discourse.

The Bahá'í community is a faith community which traces its genesis back to the life and writings of Mirzá Husayn-`Alí, known more widely by the title Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh was born of the Persian nobility in the early nineteenth century but turned his back on the court of the Shah in order to become a champion of the poor and needy in his country. He spoke out against nationalism, racism, sexism, religious fanaticism and other forms of discrimination and oppression. He also counseled the people of his day to recognize, and adapt to, an era of increasing global interdependence. "Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self", Bahá'u'lláh wrote (1939, p. 94). "Soon will the present-day order be rolled up and a new one spread out in its stead" (1939, p. 7); "the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens" (1939, p. 250). Bahá'u'lláh asserted, moreover, that in this age of increasing global interdependence "the well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established" (1939, p. 286).

In reaction to the growing influence that Bahá'u'lláh was having throughout the region, he was incarcerated, tortured, stripped of his possessions, and condemned to live the remaining years of his life as a prisoner and exile of the Persian and Ottoman empires. However, from the example of his life, and from his continued correspondence behind various prison walls, Bahá'u'lláh scattered the seeds of a globally-conscious community that have since taken root in every country on earth.

Rationale for Studying the Bahá'í Community

The International Bahá'í community is a unique contemporary phenomenon. It is a steadily growing voluntary association of people from more than 2,100 different ethnic backgrounds, representing all nations and socio-economic classes on earth. With a current membership of more than five million people, it constitutes a microcosm of the planet's diverse human population. As a democratically organized community, it has locally elected governing assemblies in more than 11,000 localities worldwide, nationally elected governing assemblies in more than 180 independent nations and territories, and an internationally elected governing body that provides coordination on a global scale. By all of these measures, it is likely the most diverse, widely distributed, democratically organized community of people on the planet today.¹

Held together by a commitment to the equality and interdependence of all people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, nationality, or religious background, the community has been quietly and non-violently laboring for more than 150 years in its efforts to construct an alternative social order on a global scale. Its members believe that this system will one day demonstrate its efficacy to the rest of the world as a just and sustainable model of social organization that others can learn from as the pressures of increasing global interdependence continue to grow.

In this regard, the Bahá'í community is just beginning to emerge from relative obscurity on the world scene. In areas such as human rights, the advancement of women, education and literacy, environmental preservation, and sustainable development, the work of the Bahá'í community is becoming increasingly well known by other movements and organizations working in these same fields. The Bahá'í community is also widely known within the United Nations system for its collaborative relationships with a wide range of non-governmental organizations as well as the leadership roles it has been called upon to assume at UN-sponsored global forums and conventions. For instance, it played a prominent role as both an organizer and participant in the series of UN-sponsored forums in the 1990s, from the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio) to the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing). The principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community subsequently served as co-chair of the UN Millennium Forum of non-governmental organizations, and was asked to represent that Forum by presenting its *Declaration and Agenda for Action* to the heads of state assembled at the UN Millennium Summit. In all of these respects, the Bahá'í community has clearly emerged as a global movement worthy of scholarly attention.

Notes on Methodology

The international Bahá'í community defies simple categorization. It is a universally-inclusive faith community with a spiritual worldview; it is a worldwide social movement with a clearly articulated social change agenda; it is a grassroots network of social and economic development projects; it is a decentralized global system for the education of children and the training of human resources; it is an integrated structure of global democratic governance; and it is a prominent international non-governmental organization within the United Nations system. For the purpose of this analysis, however, it will be presented as a distinct *discourse*

¹ For published figures on the size and growth of the international Bahá'í community, refer to Bahá'í World Centre (1998). For corroborating sources outside of the Bahá'í Community, refer to

statistics published in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *World Christian Encyclopedia*.

community: a community of people who share a common way of thinking and talking about social reality, from which they derive unique social structures and practices.

Given that *discourse analysis* has become a prominent and influential framework within the humanities (e.g., Foucault, 1970, 1980; Hall, 1992; Phillips & Hardy, 2002), this approach will serve to illustrate how tools developed for the deconstruction of dominant social norms and institutions might also be adapted for the constructive examination of alternative social experiments. Furthermore, the Bahá'í community is particularly well-suited for analysis as a global discourse community because it has produced a unified and coherent body of thought, text, and practice that can be analyzed as a distinct cultural formation that spans all national and ethnic boundaries.

The following analysis draws from a range of primary texts, written or commissioned by the central authors and institutions of the Bahá'í community. These include the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, `Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, as well as documents written or commissioned by the international governing body of the Bahá'í community, the Universal House of Justice.² These texts were analyzed by searching for, and extracting, themes and concepts that were clearly and consistently present throughout the entire body of texts. In the presentation of these themes and concepts below, extensive use of quotations is used in order to preserve the original vocabulary and minimize the imposition of the writers' own voice. Also, for simplicity and clarity, Bahá'ís are referred to collectively in the analysis below, as though they speak with a single voice. In part, this is a stylistic choice intended to make the discussion more readable. However, it also reflects the unusual degree of consensus that exists among Bahá'ís regarding their core principles and practices. Because the Bahá'í Community is a voluntary association of individuals who have been drawn together by a commitment to a clearly-articulated set

of principles and practices, these principles and practices are not in dispute within the community.

Finally, any cultural formation or discourse community can be studied from either of two vantage points: from an *emic* (internal) or an *etic* (external) perspective (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990). Within disciplines that relied exclusively on the latter, critical theorists began to emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century advocating a need for the former. Thus the study of feminist organizations and movements by feminists has long since been legitimized, even as the study of indigenous cultures by indigenous people is now actively encouraged. Having turned this corner on analytical perspective, emic and etic perspectives are now widely understood as complementary and mutually enhancing, rather than contradictory and mutually exclusive. With that said, the following analysis proceeds from an emic perspective, written by individuals with over 50 years of combined experience as participant-observers within diverse Bahá'í communities on four continents. While etic perspectives on the Bahá'í community are also valuable and necessary, that work must be performed by others.

The Bahá'í Concept of World Citizenship

In order to understand the Bahá'í concept of world citizenship, it is first necessary to examine the "organic worldview" that it derives from, and to distinguish this worldview from other organic conceptions of society. Beliefs regarding the unity and interdependence of the human species, the nature of the relationship between human beings and their environment, and the processes of growth and adaptation that characterize humanity's collective evolution, are generally conveyed through organic metaphors within Bahá'í discourse – as the discussion below will illustrate. Historically, however, organic conceptions of society have also been invoked by other groups. Frequently, these metaphors have been used as means of "imposing harmony" on the populations that various privileged and self-interested groups have governed or exploited. As authors such as Nader (1991), de Jouvenel; (1993), Schweitzer (1996), and Rose (1992) have pointed out, organic metaphors have been used to stifle diversity, suppress human rights, and maintain a false (and often fragile) consensus regarding the preservation of the status quo.

In contrast to this largely elitist and self-serving organicism, Bahá'ís invoke organic metaphors as a means of promoting diversity, preserving human rights, and pursuing social change. Bahá'ís believe that one of the root causes of social injustice and inequity is humanity's inability to recognize its growing interdependence and pattern its collective life accordingly. In the absence of this recognition, Bahá'ís point out, oppressive and exploitative social relations are perceived as normal, natural, and

² From 1853 until his death in 1892, Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned by the Persian and Ottoman empires for his leadership of the "heretical" movement that coalesced under his name. Throughout the course of his forty-year imprisonment and exile, he wrote extensively, including a prolific correspondence with a steadily growing community of supporters throughout the Middle East. In these writings, he articulated the basic principles and organizational structure of the Bahá'í community. Before his death, he appointed his eldest son, `Abdu'l-Bahá, to succeed him in his efforts to build and strengthen the nascent Bahá'í community. `Abdu'l-Bahá continued these efforts while remaining a prisoner until 1908. After his release from prison, he carried on this work until his own death in 1921, at which time he appointed Shoghi Effendi to succeed him. Under the efforts of `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, the nascent Bahá'í community grew into a diverse, global, and well-organized movement. Ten years after Shoghi Effendi's death in 1953, the Bahá'í community had grown to the point that it could elect its first international governing body, the Universal House of Justice, which now directs and coordinates the work of the community worldwide.

inevitable because conflict, rather than cooperation, is assumed to be the defining characteristic of human existence (UHJ 1985).³

In advocating the organic unity and interdependence of the human race, Bahá'ís call into question some of the twentieth century's most deeply entrenched assumptions. The most obvious of these, they suggest,

is the conviction that unity is a distant, almost unattainable ideal to be addressed only after a host of political conflicts have been somehow resolved, material needs somehow satisfied, and injustices somehow corrected. The opposite is the case. The primary disease that afflicts society and generates the ills that cripple it... is the disunity of a human race that is distinguished by its capacity for collaboration and whose progress to date has depended on the extent to which unified action has, at various times and in various societies, been achieved. To cling to the notion that conflict is an intrinsic feature of human nature, rather than a complex of learned habits and attitudes, is to impose on a new century an error which, more than any other single factor, has tragically handicapped humanity's past (BIC Haifa, 1999).⁴

According to this perspective, Bahá'ís interpret contemporary world crises as mounting evolutionary pressures that are compelling us toward “an organic change in the structure of present-day society” (Effendi, 1974, p. 43). Bahá'ís believe that inherited social structures and practices, which evolved under very different historical conditions, are maladaptive in the face of these changing conditions. The question, according to Bahá'ís, is whether humanity will adapt new social structures and practices out of a forward-looking response to these mounting evolutionary pressures or whether humanity will adapt only in response to ever-more catastrophic events “precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behavior” (UHJ 1985, p. 1).

In this regard, Bahá'ís suggest that if we are to adopt a forward-looking approach to the challenges that increasingly face us,

we must begin by appreciating the magnitude of change required to bring about thought and actions more appropriate to life-enhancing virtues and practices. The “world problematique” demands a radical transformation in the hearts and minds of mankind. We appear to be frozen in our present patterns of perception, employing old models and concepts. Such patterns have existed for centuries and are rooted in the concepts of nation states, national sovereignty, conflict and combat, winning and losing. (BIC UN, 1987)

Accordingly, Bahá'ís suggest that “the bedrock of a strategy that can engage the world's population in assuming responsibility for its collective destiny must be the consciousness of the oneness of humankind” (BIC Haifa, 1995, p. 2). This deceptively simple concept, they explain,

presents fundamental challenges to the way that most of the institutions of contemporary society carry out their functions. Whether in the form of the adversarial structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, a glorification of the struggle between classes and other social groups, or the competitive spirit dominating so much of modern life, conflict is accepted as the mainspring of human interaction. (BIC Haifa, 1995, p. 2)

“Only through the dawning consciousness that they constitute a single people”, Bahá'ís assert, “will the inhabitants of the planet be enabled to turn away from the patterns of conflict that have dominated social organization in the past and begin to learn the ways of collaboration and conciliation” (BIC Haifa, 1995, p. 3). Moreover, they insist that the social and environmental costs of clinging to these inherited patterns of conflict will only continue to mount (BIC UN, 1996). However, in calling for a recognition of the unity and interdependence of the human species, Bahá'ís also emphatically caution against any notion of unity that results in a stifling of diversity. The Bahá'í concept of unity should therefore not be confused with a prescription for uniformity. Rather, it is a prescription for “unity in diversity” (BIC UN, 1996). Moreover, Bahá'ís view diversity not simply as something to be tolerated but as an essential collective resource to be valued and further cultivated. “Much like the role played by the gene pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment”, they explain,

the immense wealth of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social and economic development of the human race... It represents a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global civilization... protected from suffocation by the materialistic influences currently holding sway [and] free of manipulation for partisan political ends. (BIC Haifa, 1995, p. 10)

In addition, Bahá'ís also caution against any notion of organic unity that results in the suppression of basic human rights. In contrast to the oppressive organicism that has sometimes been invoked in order to maintain power over others, the Bahá'í concept of unity implies that society must become the collective trustee of basic human rights. “Each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole”, they state, and implied in such a trusteeship are a range of

³ In the interest of brevity, the abbreviation UHJ will be used to refer to the Universal House of Justice in citations throughout this text.

⁴ The title “Bahá'í International Community” is used by Bahá'ís to designate public information offices at the United Nations, as well as at the international center of the Bahá'í community in Haifa, Israel. In the interest of brevity, the abbreviation BIC will be substituted for this title in citations throughout this text.

collective responsibilities (BIC Haifa, 1995, p. 10). These include responsibilities to ensure, for instance, the security of the family and the home, the ownership of property, and the right to privacy... the provision of employment, mental and physical health care, social security, fair wages, rest and recreation, and a host of other reasonable expectations on the part of the individual members of society... [including] also the right of every person to expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy the protection of national and international law. (BIC Haifa, 1995, p. 10)

In the Bahá'í view, therefore, this concept of trusteeship constitutes the moral foundation of the human rights that an increasingly interdependent humanity has struggled to articulate in recent generations (BIC UN, 1995b, p. 4).

At the same time, Bahá'ís acknowledge that the transformation of consciousness that all of these principles imply will inevitably be a difficult and gradual process. Although they see the possibility of incremental advances in the years immediately ahead, they believe that fundamental change will ultimately require cultivating new attitudes and values across successive generations. Thus they suggest that, among other strategies,

efforts should be concentrated on reaching children and youth, who are still in the process of forming the values that will shape their lives. Instilling in our children respect for themselves and others, recognition of the oneness of humanity, appreciation of unity in diversity, and a sense of citizenship in a world community will be the best guarantee of improved protection of human rights in the years to come. (BIC UN, 1997)

In this regard, Bahá'ís around the world have been working to ensure that “world citizenship be taught in every school and that the oneness of humanity—the principle underlying world citizenship—be constantly asserted” (BIC UN, 1993). “Governments and educational agencies”, they assert,

should seek to make the principle of world citizenship part of the standard education of every child... Based on the principle of the oneness of the human race, they should cultivate tolerance and brotherhood, nurturing an appreciation for the richness and importance of the world's diverse cultural, religious and social systems and strengthening those traditions that contribute to a sustainable, world civilization. They should teach the principle of “unity in diversity” as the key to strength and wealth both for nations and for the world community. They should foster an ethic of service to the common good and convey an understanding of both the rights and the responsibilities of world citizenship. (BIC UN, 1993)

While governmental leaders and educators in various countries are beginning to show increased

receptivity to these ideas, Bahá'ís have been successfully teaching these concepts to children within their own families and communities for over one hundred and fifty years – and they offer this experience as a model that is open for all to study.

Bahá'ís also recognize that education alone is not sufficient. Structural and institutional reform – especially in the arena of international governance – will also be required on the path toward a more peaceful, just, and sustainable social order. They assert that until the nations of the world design and elect international institutions that can integrate, coordinate, and regulate certain vital collective functions, humanity will be unable to effectively address the increasingly urgent global problems that it now faces (BIC UN, 1995b, pp. 1-2).

Bahá'ís believe, in this regard, that an integrative process – comparable to the processes that led to the emergence of organized nation states – is now beginning to take place at the global level (BIC UN, 1995a). They see the founding of the League of Nations and the United Nations as two of the earliest institutional experiments in this regard (BIC UN, 1995b, p. 2). Bahá'ís assert, however, that both of these attempts have been largely unsuccessful because they both “sought to address the emergent recognition of global interdependence while nevertheless preserving intact a system which put the sovereignty of the state above all else” (BIC UN, 1995b, p. 2). What is needed, Bahá'ís believe, is a genuine universal framework that transcends anachronistic notions of national sovereignty (UHI 1985, p. 6). World unity, they explain,

is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish. (Effendi, 1974, p. 202).

In its place, Bahá'ís advocate a system of international federalism that would devolve authority to the lowest level possible while still allowing for global coordination and regulation where necessary. Elaborating on this theme, Bahá'ís assert that

any new structures for global governance must, as a matter of both principle and practicality, ensure that the responsibility for decision-making remains at appropriate levels... Striking the right balance may not always be easy. On the one hand, genuine development and real progress can be achieved only by people themselves, acting individually and collectively, in response to the specific concerns and needs of their time and place... On the other hand, the international order clearly requires a degree of global direction and coordination... international institutions should be given the authority to act only on issues of international concern where states cannot act on their own or to intervene for the preservation of the rights of peoples and member states.

All other matters should be relegated to national and local institutions. (BIC UN, 1995b, p. 5)

Such a system, according to Bahá'ís, would need to include some form of a world tribunal, a world executive, and a world legislature elected by people from around the world and confirmed by their respective governments (UHJ 1985, pp. 9-12). Within the system, certain forms of national sovereignty would need to be ceded, including the right to maintain armaments for the purposes of war. In this regard, Bahá'ís have advocated, for well over a century, a system of collective security in which all nations would contribute to an international force designed to deter aggression while at the same time relieving nations of the oppressive burden of escalating military expenditures (UHJ 1985, pp. 9-10).

While advocating a system of international federalism, Bahá'ís acknowledge that “extraordinary care must be taken in designing the architecture of the international order so that it does not over time degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagoguery” (BIC UN, 1995b, p. 6). Toward this end, Bahá'ís suggest that democratic governance must be reconceptualized and restructured as a call to service rather than a contest for power.

Bahá'ís thus prescribe (and practice) an electoral model that is fundamentally non-partisan and non-competitive, in which voters have complete freedom of choice and public servants are elected for their integrity and capacity rather than their ambition and partisanship. Bahá'ís also prescribe (and practice) frequent election cycles, so that the membership of a governing body can easily be replaced as the need arises. And finally, Bahá'ís prescribe (and practice) a model of decision making based on cooperative inquiry rather than argumentative persuasion, in which diversity is viewed as an asset, deliberation is raised to the level of ethical principle (as distinct from self-serving political pragmatism), participants strive for consensus but settle for a majority when necessary, and the entire decision-making process is shielded from the distorting effect of powerful lobbies yet remains open to the views and concerns of all segments of society.

In many respects, this system is so different from conventional partisan systems of governance that people who are unfamiliar with its application often find it difficult to accept its practicality. Because it fundamentally redefines notions of power, authority, hierarchy, and interest, skeptics sometimes conclude that it is naïve, utopian, or incompatible with human nature. However, based on over a century of practical experience, Bahá'ís believe that the system has proven its viability. Moreover, they point out that in contrast to partisan electoral systems, this non-partisan system is unifying rather than divisive.

And, as outside observers have acknowledged, it remains eminently democratic.⁵

As with the Bahá'í experience in education for global citizenship, Bahá'ís offer their experience with these electoral and decision-making principles as a model for others to study. Based on these principles, the Bahá'í community has constructed a globally integrated system of democratic governance that coordinates the affairs of the community on local, regional, national, and international levels. And Bahá'ís have found the principles underlying the model to be adaptable to, and consistent with the aspirations of, people from every cultural background from which Bahá'ís are drawn – which is every cultural background on earth.

As a microcosm of the earth's diverse human population, Bahá'ís also uphold the need to protect cultural identities in the face of global political integration. At first glance, this may sound paradoxical. How can Bahá'ís prescribe global integration and yet profess a commitment to global cultural diversity? “Loyalty to a large entity”, Bahá'ís point out,

does not necessarily conflict with loyalty to a small entity. We live and work in many social units and institutional environments, often nested one within the other, that are complementary and often mutually supportive. Love of one's country does not preclude love of family or community, rather, it enlarges the circle of relationships (BIC UN, 1997).

Accordingly, Bahá'ís suggest that expressions of loyalty, citizenship, and patriotism can be expanded to a global scale without conflicting with legitimate national sentiments and allegiances. “The diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world”, they insist, “are not to be ignored or suppressed, but a wider loyalty, a larger aspiration is called upon” (BIC UN, 1995a). Elaborating on this theme, they state that

Unbridled nationalism, as distinguished from a sane and legitimate patriotism, must give way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole... The concept of world citizenship is a direct result of the contraction of the world into a single neighborhood through scientific advances and of the indisputable interdependence of nations. Love of all the world's peoples does not exclude love of one's country. The advantage of the part in a world society is best served by promoting the advantage of the whole. (UHJ 1985, p. 5)

⁵ For instance, a United Nations study that was commissioned for the newly independent country of Namibia suggested that Namibians “examine the electoral provisions within Bahá'ís communities worldwide” which, the study concluded, were “certainly more democratic than what goes on in most state elections” (United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1989, pp. 6-7).

Moreover, “with each passing crisis in world affairs”, they point out, “it becomes easier for the citizen to distinguish between a love of country that enriches one’s life, and submission to inflammatory rhetoric designed to provoke hatred and fear of others” (UHJ 2002, p. 1). Bahá’ís thus believe that this “sane and legitimate patriotism” reflects a growing recognition by people around the planet that we are all citizens of a single world community.

A Response to Skeptics

Some might argue that Bahá’í discourse and the practice that derives from it are so hopelessly idealistic that they do not warrant academic attention. In particular, two lines of skepticism can be anticipated. First, how can unity and interdependence be achieved on a global scale when human nature appears to be fundamentally competitive, aggressive, and “tribalistic”? Second, how can this “new world order” be prevented from turning into mere unfettered free-market exploitation, on the one hand, or authoritarian oppression, on the other?

In response to the first of these concerns, there is no question that Western-liberal social structures have been constructed upon the premise that human beings are essentially competitive and self-interested creatures. Furthermore, there is no question that the system of competing nation states that emerged in recent centuries derives from similar assumptions writ large, and embodies relatively “tribalistic” tendencies – if by “tribalistic” we mean the inclination to make in-group and out-group distinctions and work for the interests of one’s in-group at the expense of “others”.

The problem with skepticism based on the human nature argument, however, is that it is notoriously difficult to separate human nature from human culture. In Western-liberal cultures that presume human nature is essentially competitive, aggressive, and tribalistic, and that structure virtually every social institution accordingly (e.g., partisan political systems, legal adversary systems, capitalist economic systems, competitive educational systems, and competitive forms of recreation), it should not be surprising that human beings behave in relatively competitive, aggressive, and tribalistic ways. Within such cultures, these assumptions about human nature become self-fulfilling. Observing human behavior within the matrix of these cultures tells us very little about human nature and a great deal about the cultures themselves.

Moreover, the traditional Western-liberal consensus regarding human nature is showing signs of fatigue. It is now being challenged in every academic discipline (refer, for example, to Axelrod, 1984; Bandura, 1973; Bateson, 1985; Brocke-Utne, 1989; Carrithers, 1989; Howell & Willis, 1989; Kohn, 1990; Leakey & Lewin, 1977; Lunati, 1992; Mansbridge, 1990; Margolis, 1982; Mark & Ervin,

1970; Monroe, 1998; Montagu, 1976; S. Rose, Lewontin, & Kamin, 1987; Seville, 1987; Zamagni, 1995). It is also being rejected by growing numbers of ordinary people who see it as a basis for many of the oppressive and unsustainable features of our modern world.

A full critique of Western-liberal assumptions about human nature is beyond the scope of this article. Such critiques, along with alternative perspectives on human nature, can be found in the many references cited immediately above. For the purpose of this article, suffice it to say that the traditional Western-liberal view of human nature can just as readily be interpreted as a hegemonic construct that serves the interests of privileged segments of society who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to it and who now occupy social positions from which they continue (consciously or unconsciously) to cultivate this view as popular “common sense” (Karlberg, 2004). After all, when virtually every social institution is structured as a contest, who tends to win in those contests? The more powerful contestants, of course.

The second line of skepticism posed above was: how can this “new world order” be prevented from turning into mere unfettered free-market exploitation, on the one hand, or authoritarian oppression, on the other? As with the human nature argument, however, this line of reasoning can just as easily be reversed. From an objective standpoint, it is just as plausible to suggest that the *only* way to avoid either of these undesirable scenarios is to consciously steer the process of globalization in a just, sustainable, and peaceful manner. This is precisely what Bahá’ís, along with countless others, are suggesting.

The question facing humanity today is not *whether* to proceed with globalization. The question facing humanity is *how* to proceed with globalization. Globalization is a product of our reproductive and technological success as a species, and it has already been gathering momentum for centuries. Unfettered free-market exploitation seems a highly likely outcome if we entrust the process of globalization entirely to free-market mechanisms operating outside the confines of a democratic and just system of global governance. Likewise, authoritarian oppression on a global scale seems another likely outcome if we continue to structure the international arena as a contest of nations in which the most powerful nations prevail.

The absence of international institutions that can effectively regulate a global market, and the perpetuation of a system of competitive and highly militarized nation states that exercise virtually unfettered national sovereignty, can be understood as two of the root causes of social oppression and ecological degradation in the modern world. Like the competitive and self-interested model of human nature that both systems derive from, these systems

can be understood as hegemonic constructs that serve the interests of privileged segments of a global society who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them, and who now occupy social positions from which to cultivate “common sense” support for the perpetuation of these systems (Karlberg, 2004).

Granted, many skeptics who have unconsciously adopted Western-liberal assumptions about human nature and social order will dismiss the analysis in this paper as naïve and uncritical. Indeed, one blind reviewer of an earlier draft of this paper made two comments that were highly illuminating in this regard. First, the reviewer asserted that the discussion of Bahá'í discourse and practice in this paper lacked “real critical engagement” and “critical self-awareness”. What the reviewer meant, it seems, is that the paper does not turn a critical gaze inward at the Bahá'í community itself. What the reviewer fails to recognize, however, is that this paper turns a critical gaze toward the taken-for-granted norms and assumptions of Western-liberal society, by using Bahá'í discourse and practice as a critical and reflective lens. In this respect, the paper is indeed critically engaged and self-aware, given that its authors grew up within the Western-liberal cultural matrix. What the paper does is reverse the gaze of conventional criticism by exposing the deepest underlying assumptions of this Western-liberal tradition – assumptions that also underlie most critical scholarship in the West. In this context, the discussion above, and the Bahá'í worldview that it derives from, embody a fundamental critique of the prevailing social order, based on deep commitments to social justice, directed toward radical social change. This critique, however, is developed through a method of constructive modeling and contrast rather than the familiar modes of critical deconstruction.

The reviewer's second comment was that this paper needed to develop more of “a critical dialectic” between the Bahá'í worldview and its Western-liberal counterpart. Yet, here again, the reviewer fails to recognize that this is precisely what this paper is initiating. This paper is an invitation for humanities scholars to enter into a sustained critical engagement with these contrasting interpretations of human nature and social order, within the context of globalization. This

engagement requires, of course, that both of these contrasting worldviews be critically interrogated. But all cannot be accomplished in a single paper, and the immediate goals of this paper are, first, to point out that critique and deconstruction are necessary but insufficient undertakings in the humanities, and second, to initiate an exploration of constructive models of globalization by using the Bahá'í experience as a case study. This case study clearly sets up and invites the critical dialectic that the above reviewer is calling for.

Conclusion

This article has dwelt at length on the examination of one particular model of global integration – that of the international Bahá'í community. Its purpose, however, has not been to persuade readers that Bahá'ís have all the answers to current global questions. Rather, its purpose has been to demonstrate that emerging models of global citizenship exist, and that humanities scholars would do well to consider what insights can be gleaned from them. These emerging models can be understood as vast, naturally occurring social experiments that we can monitor, study, and learn from.

The preceding examination of Bahá'í discourse and practice represents only one perspective on one particular model of global integration. This emic analysis clearly needs to be complemented by etic analyses and critical interrogations of the same model, along with similar analyses of other models that are emerging around the planet. This paper is an invitation to engaged dialogue among all of these analytical viewpoints.

In this dialogue, the critique and deconstruction of anachronistic social constructs is necessary but insufficient. At the opening of the twenty-first century, when humanity is struggling to come to terms with the exigencies of global interdependence, humanities scholars also need to articulate constructive insights regarding how to approach globalization in a just, sustainable, and humane manner. If we are looking for new directions in the humanities – for a twenty-first century agenda – this is one place to start.

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