

## DISCUSSION ON 'WAR' AND 'PEACE' IN THE PAST AND OUR TIME'S AGENDAS WITH A REFERENCE OF TOLSTOY'S NOVEL *WAR AND PEACE*

Doç. Dr. Beyhan ASMA\*

### Özet

Bu çalışmada savaş ve barışın anlam ve önemi üzerinde durulup ünlü Rus yazar Lev Tolstoy'un dünyaca tanınmış eseri *Savaş ve Barış* örnek alınmış ve günümüzün gelişen olaylarıyla 'savaş' ve 'barış' sözcükleri, insan hakları ve evrensel boyuttaki felsefi bakış açısı baz alınarak, Tolstoy'un görüş ve düşünceleri ile pekiştirilerek dile getirilmeye çalışılmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Savaş, barış, Tolstoy, tarih, zaman, insan hakları.

### Abstract

In this study I would like to emphasize what is the real meaning of 'peace' and 'war' in the light of the eminent novel writer, Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In this particular paper Tolstoy's work has been taken an example to evaluate the developments of the modern times and to shed a light on the meaning of 'war' and 'peace' and human rights with a philosophical view on universal understanding.

**Key words:** War, peace, Tolstoy, history, time, human rights.

My purpose in this piece of study is promoting 'peace' aiming to discover especially 'peace' and 'war' by elucidating the notion of what is "peace and war" in negative and positive way; as well as clearing what is peace and what is war in the way I understand. Furthermore it aims to ask and answer what was the cause of war in the past, and what is it in the present.

The pity of war, the terror of war, the devastation of war – none of meaning of them have been able to be understood fully by even today's modern people. It is true that the vast majority of people condemn war and would like to put an end to it and they wish to live under peace. However it is an inevitable truth that the cause of war and its consequences are intimately and viably related to how successfully the peace is conducted. Indeed war is the natural fruit of communities' way to conduct their normal lives in a state what is called as peace, by which it means no more than present and temporary absence of war. War and peace are bound together in seemingly remorseless unbreakable dialectic, exercising a perennially sinister hold over and fascination for the men's minds.

So as to work on the question of why people fight against each other; people ought to study how they

---

\* Erciyes University, Turkey.

should live in peace too. As being reasonable and responsible people living a period of post-two world wars and under the shadow of the continuing arms race; as well as consuming the world's resources at the rate of over million dollars each year, it is a crucial duty thinking of the connection between war and peace. At this point as one of the most prolific work of comparative literature, and one of the most eminent novels of the world literature *War and Peace* comes to my mind immediately. Since in *War and Peace* the great Russian writer Tolstoy deals with history of war and peace, the mystery of death and the reality of life and death. It presents the reader a whole picture of human life; a whole picture of Russia of those days; a whole picture of struggle between nations; and a whole picture of the things in which people put their greatness-their weakness, sorrow, happiness and shame. Furthermore in this masterpiece all the secrets of life and death or peace and war are showed .

Up to our time, it has been heard from many literary critics that Tolstoy's *War and Peace* has deep humane and moral messages. The commentators of the novel want us not to regard it as an outstanding piece of artifice, but as the great masterpiece of life – war and peace; that is, not as a reflection, but as a human life itself, not as fiction, but as a universe parallel to the one in which we have been living. Such a high distinctive work could be commended and understood by historians, philosophers, military people, academicians, theologians, patriots and great lovers of humanity along the world, even if he or she were not artists at all.

Tolstoy's novel is enriched with one more dimension: next to those of historical events it provides philosophy and a complex fictional plot in which two eras of history have come together. *War and Peace* is different; since while it is set between past and present; the lives of his fictional characters, various particular scenes and events, movements, glances, habits and customs are extending in the novel. Additionally real meaning of "The War" and "The Peace" words are emerging in people's mind as well as in their real life. Consequently, there is something in *War and Peace* that instantly moves people to perceive the whole novel not only as a realistic pictorial representation of "war" and "peace", but also as a statement of high philosophical and moral order for the freedom of human beings. For this reason, an analysis of Tolstoy's ideas, as we encounter them in the novel, amounts to a contemplation of the masterpiece's artistic qualities that show themselves as judgments of "War" and "Peace", beyond the scope of narration which come from a dimension outside the literature.

In his book Rimvydas Silbajor's comments that if the world of outside realities, when carefully retraced by Tolstoy, becomes one of inner human experiences, then the world of ideas, retraced with equal care from its outlines in Tolstoy's mind, becomes the physical world of objects, movements, colors and events. Thus, for instance, the morning mist that the Russian troops descend into just before the battle of Austerlitz becomes the idea that all is lost, or the earth shuddering under the blow of cannonball slapping into the ground, also becomes the human agony of a soldier being flogged, naked and spread-eagled on the grass. That is the second direction from which we may approach an assessment of Tolstoy's place in the world literature and in particular, in *War and Peace*. With these lines we might consider Tolstoy's universality and picture of war and human life in the era which he lived in.

As it has been known that Leo Tolstoy was a typical Russian provincial aristocrat. Surrounded by laboring serfs, he lived in leisure and with no obligations to anyone on a comfortable estate. His ambition was to serve his country as a soldier, in a manner worthy of his privileged, aristocratic class. In its real-life origins, the novel *War and Peace* rest on the foundations of two realities in Tolstoy's personal life: His joining to the Crimean War; and the peace of his early, happy days in Yasnaya Polyana.

The story of novel and Tolstoy's ideological development include the seminal force of all western ideas that sprung up in Russia in the years of Napoleonic Wars. Actually, the period of post Decembrist disaster the westward-looking philosophy had settled in the minds of many Russian intelligentsia . It became an ideology representing liberal, rationalistic, progressive and even socialist-utopian views, meanwhile we also see a mistrust in the negative portrayals of Napoleon and other military leaders, whom Tolstoy shows as

representers of the western and penchant for rationalistic theorizing and model-building. Tolstoy's anti-westernism is seen in his opinion of history and war on which he commended by both clear arguments and portraying characters' fates too.

In the novel there are a lot of arguments and dialogues about "war" and "peace", humankind, God and sin which are sometimes deeply intense and sometimes abstract and these are represented by the characters themselves. In that sense *War and Peace* is a history of more than "war" against a muted background of great events. The events and other matters of the world Wars represented in the trends of the century were depicted in the spirit of Tolstoy's own time frame.

We may see how terror of war spreads upward and outward like a tree drawing in and feeding upon more and more realistic aspects, time, space, human thoughts and objects that contain civilization, devil and angelic human feelings from which the disgusting war and infinity of human life and finally the indifference of death occur. With this notion alone, that Tolstoy's *War and Peace* drives nourishment for all its vitality from the ultimate indifference of war and may seem terrible. But we might also consider "war" and "peace" not as something a writer is writing about, but as something that grows simultaneously in our minds as we read it in the novel.

Since the moment the book made its appearance a long time ago, literary critics have been acclaiming *War and Peace* as a literary masterpiece, but most of them have entirely ignored Tolstoy's contribution to the philosophy of history by reflecting it to our time and continuously keeping it as our consider. Tolstoy's outstanding contribution is also a written literary document revealing one of the most crucial cause of "war" and "peace".

In his essay Isaiah Berlin tells us: It is an attempt to take Tolstoy's attitude toward history as seriously as he himself meant his readers to take it, although for a reason somewhat different, the light it casts on a single man of genius rather than on the fate of all mankind.

Indeed, I am prepared to take Tolstoy's novel seriously to a very important problem for the light that we encounter still as it is called "war" and bringing with itself "peace". The novel *War and Peace* itself is indeed an ignorance parallelly of novel's title, which inspired Tolstoy's own philosophy about "war" and "peace", and conflicts between these two words. I have sought the seeds of Tolstoy's conflicts concerning the nature and power in "war" and "peace", in human affairs, and in particular how it manifests itself in *War and Peace*.

In my view Tolstoy is supreme in his role as a political thinker and moralist when he is expressing his opinions about "war" and "peace" in such a nice way in *War and Peace*. Moreover, in his art he possesses a weapon which he can handle when he chooses use it with the devastating power of a sledgehammer to demolish a false argument about war. I will confine myself to a single instance, although it is known vaguely today, an argument which achieved widespread welcome in the nineteenth century emphasized on the composition of war.

Tolstoy's rejection of any kind of "war" totally sprang from his intimate knowledge based on the first-hand experiences. His rejection rested upon an entire metaphysic which was revealed very clearly in the antithesis between the forces of love and power. This novel concern with how Tolstoy came finally a conscious realization of this truth after a great inward turmoil. But it is also concerned to trace the genesis of Tolstoy's understanding of the moral universe, oriented in particular in his understanding of the true significance of the phenomenon of war.

All these aspects drove me to this conclusion that Tolstoy's fundamental thoughts are representatives of the whole mankind for a basic problem which is "war" and "peace", and the reasons of these two. As it is

seen in *War and Peace*, Tolstoy touches every realm of life with an immense energy and he sees quite clearly that the duality of “war” and “peace” stands at the heart of how a man's interpretation of the world and time in which he lived. Thoughts emerged from Tolstoy’s synthesis is the central subject matter of *War and Peace*, and nothing would be served by anticipating it here. I would say that Tolstoy had totally been a religious thinker. Tolstoy was always against war in this sense he was purely rationalist. No one is less mystic or more impotent with mysticism than Tolstoy. But he only arrives at his rational and religious conclusion as a result of an analysis of the essence of the world of “war” and “peace” summarized explicitly in his work , *War and Peace*.

Let’s see how Tolstoy describes and depicts the warfare to his reader :

All their rushing and galloping at one another did little harm, the harm of disablement and death was caused by the balls and bullets that flew over the fields on which these men were floundering about. As soon as they left the place where the balls and bullets were flying about their superiors, located in the background, re-formed them and brought them under discipline and under the influence of that discipline led them back to the zone of fire, where under the influence of fear of death they lost their discipline and rushed about according to the chance prompting of throng.

Tolstoy himself is the voice of Napoleon calling the war as a slaughter and “the most terrible thing of his whole life”. Tolstoy thought war will be endless, in the contrast to Pushkin’s thought about war, since Pushkin looked forward to an era when there would be no more.

*It is imposible that in time people would not come to recognize the ridiculous cruelty of war, in the same way as they have come to recognize the true nature of slavery, of Tsarist power, etc. They will realize that our destiny is to eat, drink and be free.*

And he goes on:

*Since a constitution is already a great step in human consciousness and since this step will not be the only one, it is bound to arouse a desire for a decrease in the numbers of armies in states, for the principle of armed force is directly opposed to any constitutional idea. It is therefore possible that in less than a hundred years from now there will be no more regular armies.*

Why does “war” occur? Why do people kill? Killing is not accounted a crime by human beings, provided that this ‘necessity’ is undertaken either by the soldier or by the executioner. The executioner is told, dispenses death only to those found guilty after judicial conviction and sentence. On the other side of this issue “killing” and “war” if we look at it in the nature and human affairs, we see that it is a fact of nature, a fact of life, universal and eternal, a rule from which there is no escape. De Maistre gives explanation for this extraordinary and dreadful phenomenon as;

*Already, in the vegetable kingdom, you begin to experience the law: from the immense catalpa down to the humblest graminee, how many plants die and how many are killed! But as soon as you enter the animal kingdom, the law is suddenly terribly in evidence...In each great division of the animal species, it has selected a certain number of animals charged with the task of devouring the others: thus, there are insects of prey, reptiles of prey, birds of prey, fish of prey. There is not a moment when a living creature isn’t being devoured by another. Above these numerous animal species is placed man, whose destructive hand spares nothing of all that lives. He kills to feed himself, he kills to clothe himself, he kills to ward off others, he kills to attack, he kills to defend himself, he kills to teach himself, he kills to amuse himself, he kills to kill.*

Moreover, if we look at the actual history of mankind, we find that history demonstrates that war is the normal condition of mankind, that “peace” is no more than a respite, that blood is always flowing

somewhere or other. It is considered 'war' is divine because it represents a law of the world. It has supernatural consequences in that it is a great privilege to die in war, and a warrior may never be said to have died in vain.

In fact "war" is a divine, while Tolstoy describes it triumphantly as a terrible and mysterious affair, which is carried out not in accordance with men's will, but in accordance with the will of that which rules people and communities. It is also obvious that Tolstoy himself did not well understand what war itself is! Tolstoy's female characters did not understand war either-Princess Lisa, Marya Bolkonski, Countess Rostova. Proudhon wrote: "War establishes a huge inequality, irremediable by any means between men and women". However, it is true that Tolstoy's women do not understand war, their role always centers around the events of domestic and family life.

Tolstoy describes war with unprecedented realism from direct experience and with his incomparable imaginative power; and he tells us how terrible it is though. It is the result of a mysterious and inevitable force that guides the destiny of men. War is a force that rules the destiny of men and nations, and there is nothing that rational men can do about it other than bow their heads humbly in submission to the awful decrees of fate. For example, Kutuzov, the only one of the world's great men portrayed in the novel to be conceded as great by Tolstoy. He is considered because of his humility in the presence of the mysterious force or fate or divinity that governs history.

On the other hand, Tolstoy makes no attempt to conceal the horror, revulsion and disgust which war evokes in him. Tolstoy says war is bluntly a crime, a dreadful crime. Further, he diagnoses the causes of war with his unique honesty and extraordinary skill. His diagnosis is detailed and richly circumstantial. The cause is seen in a specific moral defect in man. Moreover, Tolstoy does not confine himself to analysing the cause of war. In one single sentence to him 'war' is 'evil', not inevitable but remediable and it is man's manifest duty to eradicate it. He wrote *War and Peace*, for he saw quite clearly that war was evil, the clarity of his moral vision was still confused by his belief that war and therefore evil in the world was inevitable, was decreed by 'fate' as a religious man. Tolstoy felt deeply about the central message of the Gospel that invites all people to love even their enemies, do good to them, not to injure them, not to persecute them and despitefully not to use them, to forgive them even, seventy seven times that would bring peace and gentleness to his soul.

Prince Andrew, who plays an important part in the military events says: "War is not courtesy but the most horrible thing in life; and we must understand that it is not a toy to play. The author himself, speaks about war in the lines of *War and Peace*:

*Millions of men perpetrated against one another such innumerable crimes, frauds, treacheries, thefts, forgeries, issues of false money, burglaries, incendiarisms, and murders, as in whole centuries are not recorded in the annals of the law courts of the world, but which those who committed them did not at the time regard as being crimes.*

And in the second epilogue, he writes again:

*Why war occurs we do not know. We only know that to produce the one or the other action people combine in a certain formation in which they all take part, and we say that this is so because it is unthinkable otherwise, or in other words that it is a law.*

War, it appears in spite of everything, is not only necessary-a world without war is unthinkable, but it is the work of God. It is no doubt significant that Tolstoy agrees with these words "War is divine", but he insists again and again saying "War is the will not of man but of God; but war is contrary to all reason".

From Pushkin, Lermantov, Gogol, Dostoyevsky to Akhmatova, Gippius, Pasternak and many others felt the inhumanity of war. But no one as much as Tolstoy evinced such a deep and lasting revulsion to its horror and presented it as simply as a monstrous crime. He hated war, for a man as truthful as Tolstoy, possessed of his implacable integrity to reject war outright, root and branch, would automatically entail a conflict to the death with his entire surrounding culture. It would involve a head-on collision with his entire inheritance – his social position, his wealth, his moral and literary standing in society, his relations with his family, his religion, his public relationship *vis-à-vis* the Church and the State. Above all, he had to begin the Herculean task of overcoming his own will having the power and rebuilding his inner life and therefore eventually his eternal life upon entirely new foundations, not simply different from the will to power, but it is very antithesis.

Tolstoy experienced violent inner resistance to knowledge that war is an indefensible evil. He was able to marshal spiritual resources to resolve the conflict aright.

According to Dr. Addicott, to the initiated in the study of ‘war’, it seems somewhat incongruent that one of man’s most violent activities should be governed by rules of conduct. He adds that some writers, such as Leo Tolstoy, have even argued that the very establishment of rules which seek to regulate warfare are immoral because such rules wrongfully cloak war with a form of legitimacy and are therefore counterproductive to the goal of eliminating the scourge of war. Tolstoy advanced the notion that the waging of war should not be regulated at all, when it becomes too horrible, rational man will outlaw war altogether. Fortunately, most serious thinkers reject this utopian attitude, acknowledging the necessity of rules of conduct to mitigate the various categories of sufferings that are the natural consequence of war. The law of war was never intended to be an idealistic proscription against war.

If we come to a conclusion with all those sayings from that time to our present time I could say that I don’t believe that the big men, the politicians and the capitalists are the ones that should be blamed for emerging of war, as well as the ordinary man is guilty, otherwise the world people would have risen in revolt long ago. There is something inside people that simply urges to destroy, kill, murder and rage. All mankind without exception undergoes a great change of thought when a war is waged that everything has been built up, cultivated and grown will be destroyed and disfigured, after which mankind will have to begin all over again...

To a large degree, history is defined by the workings of spheres of power which are commonly categorized into eras. Within these eras, the trends of history are replete with great wars whose goal was to end all wars. While the natural tendency of mankind is to promote and nourish the resulting periods of peace between wars, history unfortunately gives no encouragement to the notion that war will occur no more or peace will be more than a mere handful of years.

In a full sentence, ‘War and Peace’ which the mass of mankind perceive as two orders of things, mutually exclusive, constitute in turn the conditions of life of the people. Mutually they give rise to each other are defined by relation to each other, re-enforce and maintain one another as opposite, equal and inseparable antinomial terms...Peace presupposes war; war presupposes peace...Peace and so, war and peace are correlative occurrences, equally valid and necessary, essentially the two principal functions of mankind. They alternate in history, as in the life of the individual - waking and sleeping as with a workman – losing his strength and renewing it, as in political economy – production and consumption.

I guess that’s the all is summarized in the title of the novel *War and Peace*, and is told the philosophy of Tolstoy in very first the line of the novel titled as *War and Peace*.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Addicott F. Jeffrey. *Winning the War on Terror*. Lawyers & Judges Publishing Company, Inc. Tucson, AZ, 2003.

Berlin Isaiah. *The Hedgehog and the Fox*. London, 1967 ed., p.4.

De Maistre Joseph. *Les Soirees de Saint-Petersbourg*. Paris, 2 Vols, 1821, Vol. II., pp. 4-5.

Eikhenbaum Boris. *Lev Tolstoy: Kniga Pervaya*. Priboy Publishing House: Moscow, 1928.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Lev Tolstoy: Kniga Vtoraya (Lev Tolstoy: Volume 2)*. Priboy (The Surf) Publishing House: Moscow, 1931.

J. Simmons. In *Leo Tolstoy*, New York 1960, Vol. I, p. 311. The Russian text of this letter is in the *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, op. Cit. Vol. 61, p. 195.

Magarshak David. *Pushkin*. London 1967, pp. 120-1.

Sampson R. V. *The Discovery of Peace*. A Division of Random House: New York, 1973.

Silbajoris Rimvydas. *War and Peace 'Tolstoy's Mirror of the World'*. An Imprint of Simon & Schuster Macmillan: New York, 1995.

Tolstoy Leo. *War and Peace*, London 1943 ed. Pp. 885-6.