# Achieving a World Free of Nuclear Weapons through Progressive Humanism Derived from African Philosophy

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## Abstract

In this work I attempt to articulate how it can be held that there are adequate basis for a world that would not promote the culture of nuclear weapons as an option for a world order. To do this I advance the need for what I call a peaceable world—a world in which there is a fundamental structure for peace; where peace can be administered and made a world principle. I then provide proposals that can promote such a world by drawing from the African worldview as captured by the Nigerian philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti to formulate the basis for a form of progressive humanism (interpreted to mean where a progressive desire for a better and worthier human nature should direct the culture of reason that leads to peace). I further illustrate how the proposal for progressive humanism can provide the basis for a world free from nuclear weapons.

**Keywords**:  Nuclear Weapons, Progressive, Humanism, Morality, African worldview, Peace.

## Introduction

There are scanty literatures that attempt to theorise on peace and how or whether there can be a progressive movement of humanity to principles, values and norms that can lead to peace or improved quality of peace through non-western norms and values. Among the list of topmost journals devoted to peace[1] just one among these -*Journal of Peace Research: (http://jpr.sagepub.com)* can be said to be devoted to the  studying peace from a theoretical point of view. A  claim that can be made about this state of affairs is that the idea of peace appears to be widely and universally accepted as given principle and as one that cannot be improved upon or that cultures that promote peace are the same everywhere.

But this notion of peace deserve to be contested because based on the nature of the human community in question, the nature of peace and what it means to be at peace with each other might vary  from one community to the other more than is a common knowledge. Consider for instance a society with a proven culture of violence is accepted, where violence is rationalised and accepted as desirable norm, but which for one reason or the other begins to review its norm in favour of peace. It should be expected that the peace that can be achieved in such a society would have tinctures of  tainted  peace than an internalised peace culture; that the peace that

would be achieved  in such  society would only amount to a reluctant peace option  than quality peace with reliable socio-psychological dividend. Consider another society that believes in the theory of social Darwinism- that is, the view that human society is fundamentally competitive and that the desire to eliminate species or weaken the capacity of  other species is an inherent ethics of social belonging and so should be either desired or at least accommodated. Chances are that the notion of peace that such a society would support may not be the same notion of peace that a society that harbours contrary belief would accommodate. The essence of  the claims made here is that the assumption that what peace means is same in all societies should be suspected and that philosophical reflection should attend to the idea of peace almost in the manner that that they have attend to other virtues such as truth, justice and right; by interrogating the idea of peace. Thus it is important to note that "any project of peace even at the level of nations must recognize the canons of rationality of the subjects involved"(L.O.Ugwuanyi, 2011:679) since there are conceptual underpinnings that define the values through which  peace is desired ,valued and validated.

This work attempts to provide theoretical positions on peace by questioning the ideology of nuclear weapons which is conceived as a way of achieving a peaceful world by curtailing the abuse of force and power by nations. It proposes the view that the ideology of nuclear weapons is a false route to peace and that the notion of  peace implied by such effort deserve to be contested through an ethics of humanism  that favoursa culture of peace that can be measured progressively. The work addresses the following question : assuming that it is accepted that nuclear weaponry is not a reliable option to achieve world peace which options can be applied to achieve a culture of peace that would eliminate such option? The work will defend the claim that this can be achieved through a form of progressive humanism (interpreted to mean a world where a progressive desire for a better and worthier human nature should direct the culture of reason). It applies the views of the Nigerian-African philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti to support this claim. I shall begin (i) by articulating the idea of a peaceable world; then interrogate the ideology of nuclear weapons. Thereafter, I shall (ii) proceed to formulate positions that reverse human thinking from accepting the ideology of nuclear weapon as  formula for peace  to a more ethically desirable  option for peace derived from progressive humanism.

**Towards a Peaceable World**

Two significant variables define and direct social formations, namely culture and structure. I apply these variables to locate the route to a world free of nuclear weapons with the view that such a world would be realised when  progressive humanism define these variables and provide the basis for  a peaceable world through them. By peaceable world, I mean a world cultured and structured by peace, I mean a world in which peace has assumed the feature of a world project in the same rank as justice and knowledge. By this I mean a world in which peace becomes a driving force that defines and directs the movement and direction of mankind by defining the priorities, programmes, choices, options, plans, policies and objects of concern among mankind, one in which we were to work for and walk towards peace.

The need for such a world arises from the fact that human nature harbours potentials for conflict and would often prefer a fertile ground for its expression. The human seat of conflict is well captured by the Christian preacher St. Paul when he says that human beings often do those

things that are against their will or wish. Important thinkers and intellectuals, such as St. Augustine(2012) and Sigmund Freud, have also written to address this aspect of man.

The second need for this arises from the fact that the human society (the larger aggregation of human beings) is also prone to conflict. This conflict which is often borne out of change and the forces of growth and expansion is such that social relations by their nature desire peace to mediate in the tensions that define change. Social encounters often give rise to culture shock which results in one form of conflict or the other. Hence social formations must be properly located as a process of becoming which by its nature harbours conflict minimally (at least) and this defines the need for peace as an important ideal. Thus, when I envision a world cultured and structured by peace, I do not, however, imply that it is possible to have a world of absolute peace but that conflict and confusion can be reduced to the minimum as a result of which conflict will cease to be a desirable end or an approved project as to motivate the acquisition of nuclear weapon as an ideal.

After outlining the basis for the need for a world cultured and structured by peace a question arises: how can it be held that a world of nuclear weaponry (defined as a world in which acquiring and maintaining nuclear weapons is held as the norm) can serve the need for such a world? To address this question let me begin by outlining some outstanding values that lead to peace to see whether the ideology of nuclear weaponry support these values. Values that lead to peace include tolerance, forgiveness, empathy, sympathy, kindness, humanness, understanding, etc. These values support the cause of peace in the sense that they promote the cause of ordered human and social well-being without which a society would be in crisis. However, there are other values such as happiness, contentment, trust and love which support the society and serve as a sub-structure for peace without which individuals that make up the society cannot function as to promote peace. These values serve a very important need in the sense that they provide the foundation for individual or personal peace without which the social peace cannot be achieved. L. O. Ugwuanyi (1997:59; 2002:48) has argued that there are two kinds of peace—peace of mind and "peace of land"—and that peace of the land often depends on peace of mind to obtain since only those with inner peace can have the will for social peace or at least desire and demand social peace in a peaceful manner

Having outlined the values that promote peace, let me proceed to illustrate how or whether it can be held that a culture of nuclear weapon stands in a position to provide or support these values. To do this it is important to locate the ideology of nuclear weapons. A nuclear weapon is a destructive armament that can be applied for a maximum war also known as nuclear war. Nuclear war, on its own, is a war fought with nuclear weapons, a war with enormous potentials for destruction. In nuclear wars (such as those fought with such weapons as nuclear bombs), there is always a massive and uncontrollable destruction. The nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the World War II is a clear instance of nuclear war. This nuclear bombing killed thousands of lives in a few days. Because of the massive destructive effects of nuclear weapons, moralists argue that certain conditions must of necessity be verifiably satisfied for the use of nuclear weapons in war. They argue that (a) such war must be a defensive war, (b) the use of nuclear weapons must be indispensable for defence (for example, when an unjust aggressor is making use of a nuclear weapon which can only be defended against by the use of another nuclear weapon) (c) the proportion of good to evil must be weighed and the prospect of success

considered. Finally, (d) they also suggest that there must be limitations on the use of nuclear weapons and that the nation applying nuclear weapons must show restraint by imposing limits on its use. By this is meant that regulations must be applied to the use of nuclear weapons in order to avoid a war of total extermination.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that a nuclear weapon is a physical elaboration of an ideology of nuclear war and one which illustrates the willingness, desire or at least a disposition to nuclear war. Thus, in essence, nuclear weapon amounts a disposition towards nuclear death (interpreted to mean death without limit). In the light of this, it can be held to be counter to a world structured and cultured by peace and to harbour no potential towards peaceful values—tolerance, forgiveness, empathy, sympathy, kindness, humaneness, understanding, etc. outlined above. This is because it is rooted in a psychology of threat where the owner feels threatened or is prepared to make others feel threatened, something close to applying the ideology of fear, to promote peace.

A counterargument to this position may suggest that since dominance is an inherent aspect of human nature and most social groups would always function by dominating others, the nuclear weapon is a way to moderate this tendency. However, if this position is upheld it should be noted that nuclear weapon is, by this very argument, an approval of dominance since it demonstrates the desire to dominate the dominant force. Even more, almost every human on earth is dominated by this measure since the nuclear weapon has the capacity to kill nearly every human being on earth. So in a way nuclear weapon amounts to a disposition to maximum dominance and an approval of the vice it has purportedly set out to prevent

Secondly, if nuclear weapon should be upheld as a counter-dominance to the dominance suggested by human nature, there is need to interrogate whether this is a desired human ideal. If this position which can be likened to the theory of social Darwinism is accepted, what about the other view that there is a near-infinite capacity of man to negotiate his nature to worthier ideals such as love, tolerance, compromise and humaneness? The apostle of non-violence Martin Luther King (Jr) has illustrated this eloquently in his work *Strength to Love* (1963)

In the light of the foregoing, it can be held that the nuclear weapon is an inversion of the human ideal by elaborating human deficiency and expanding threat as a human and social capital, even though in the first place expanding threat should not be seen as an ideal. It is an expansion of man's destructive capacity which is not a desirable human ideal—instead of addressing the challenge of negotiating peace creatively, the nuclear weapon is an aberration of response to this need, by way of expanding the capacity for threat, fear and war, which even if it is suggested by the human nature, is not a desirable human ideal.

It is for this reason that a fresh value needs to be imported into the peace design to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. Here I have in mind the need to import what can be called some humanistic values to the peace project. The need for this arises from the fact that all peace values and peace gains are a response to the human needs and desires and that the effort to promote peace through this measure would have worthy gains to the human project and to the human community at large. I shall promote the quest for this value by appealing to the idea of progressive humanism inscribed in the Igbo philosophy of communalism as captured in the ideas of the Nigerian philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti.

## A Progressive Humanism for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons through the African Worldview

The idea of progressive humanism which I forward as a proposal for a world free of nuclear weapons is part of the wider philosophy of communitarianism strongly associated with peoples of sub-Saharan African. According to this principle, the community is the basic determinant in the constitution of the individual and the individual should fundamentally be loyal to the community. Several scholars have articulated this philosophy on behalf of the African people in the effort to account for what is implied by African thought on this subject (Mbiti, 1970; Gyekye, 1997; Tempels, 1959; Kaphagawani, 2006). However, I am applying the views of the Nigerian philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti to abstract and elaborate this idea and to suggest the potentials it has for a culture of peace. I apply Menkiti's position because Menkiti identifies the being human in African thought with being communal and being communal as locating the measure and values of one's personhood in and through the values and principles of the community. Although the other scholars mentioned provide valid notions of the person as deriving from or implicated in the concept of community, Menkiti believes that "the community takes metaphysical precedence over the individual and the identity of the individual is thoroughly fused with the community" (Matolino, 2014:55). He identifies the communal principle as the measure of a person's humanity form birth to death. By this is meant that one is held to be fully human to the extent that one lives a lifestyle that is approved by the community.

But participating in the life of the community is done as a person and this makes another important demand on the individual. According to Menkiti this personhood has to be attained and "the attainment of "excellencies" is a definitive aspect of what it means to be human .He submits that "personhood … is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations" (Ifeanyi Menkiti, 1984, p.172).Thus for Menkiti, "As far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be competent or ineffective, better or worse" (ibid:173). For him, being human in African thought demands passing through different stations in life and personhood "is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations in life" (ibid:176). From Menkiti, it can be suggested that a number of social and moral ethics which the African applies to regulate life, such as "sense of human value", "sense of hospitality", "sense of the sacred", "the sacredness of life", "sense of community", "sense of good human relations", and "sense of identity" (O. Onwubiko, 1989) are all geared towards attaining excellencies necessary for maximum personhood.

What then are the progressivist humanist potentials implied in this manner of thinking and what are its credential and potentials to lead to a nuclear weapon-free world? A number of progressive humanist ideals are implied in this thinking .The view that being human is defined in terms of some measure have strong import from the point of view of ethical humanism. Inferring from this thought pattern, becoming a person is no longer what can be attained by right of birth but by conscious personal effort. Implied here is a measured ethics of being human or at least a disposition to being human which can lead to a claim that some people are more morally worthy to be called human than others. In the same way becoming human

demands stronger moral measures at each stage of one's life. For the larger aggregate of humanity it would mean that there are levels or grades at which they should be held to be human. It may not just be by the number of human beings that people the earth but by their moral weight and worth and how it can be said that there is a moral ideal that mankind has figured out and is progressively growing or moving towards, that the idea of a human world can be upheld. If this position is implied and applied, then industrial threat as suggested by nuclear weapons would not be a valued moral option for peace. I submit that the culture of nuclear weapons in the world today cannot be divorced from a wrong idea of being human where there is an exercise of absolute and irresponsible notion of being human that aligns freedom and morality with force and compulsion than reason and empathy.

The idea of being human suggested by the Igbo worldview and implicated in the thoughts of Menkiti and from where Menkiti arguably draw his thesis suggests otherwise. It is an illustration of the principles of African communalism. Among the Igbo from whose worldview Menkiti abstracts his thought, it is common to hear a question such as these thrown to a person—*"ibu madu ka ibu muo?"*; meaning, are you a human being or a spirit? This question is posed to a human being not in expectation of a logical answer but a moral answer, one that indicates that there is yet a certain behavioural norm required of the individual for the individual to acquire and defend his or her personhood. This normative ethics is what is emphasised by progressive humanism. This moral measure is not available –at least in such elaborate manner-in other philosophical traditions of humanity (at least with the same meaning and in the same measure)

There are strong reasons to believe that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have become a world of having rather than being, of human beings who live by acquiring the hopes, aspirations and dreams of others, rather than being human in terms of engaging and deepening their self-worth through the examined life, and where the tendency to appropriate and acquire wealth, inclusive of human personalities is more forceful and compelling than the tendency to become human by humanising others through positive ideals . By this is meant that becoming itself has been subjected to serve the ambition to have. It is perhaps this tendency that have made some human folk to make a capital out of fear and to measure the quality of their existence in terms of their ability to "possess" other human beings by way of subjecting them to fear, by making other human beings afraid and enlarging the tendency towards fear. This, to a large extent, explains the ideology of the nuclear weapon. This is the ideology against which the African philosophy of progressive humanism harboured by the communal principle of the Igbo worldview as captured by Ifeanyi Menkiti stands in a position to contest.

It is important to harp on the idea that the attainment of excellencies as captured by Menkiti is strictly for human welfare and in favour of man. Thus a strong (re)location of being in favour of man which this humanistic ethics suggests is relevant for being human in this philosophy. In the Igbo world from which Menkiti drew his analogy of African communitarianism, the human being is referred to as madu—variously translated as *mma ndu* or *mma-di* (interpreted to mean "beauty of life" or "beauty is here"). While the northern Igbos prefer to use the world *madu*, the southern Igbos use the word *mmadu*. Emmanuel Ede(1985:100) holds that *madu* is a short form of *mma-di* which could be translated as "there is beauty". Similarly, Chielozona Eze (1998:31) suggests that "to say that that *mma du(di)* would imply that the Igbos have a sense of taste and

moral probity". The implications of these is the role which Igbos assign to measured moral worth as the foundation and basis for being human and affirming humanity. It is this measured moral worth that I invoke to address the need for a world free of nuclear weapons. I suggest that a progressive moral disposition towards humanity would mean the need for a rise in the moral quotient of mankind and if this is the case, then, an approval of nuclear weapon would not pass for an improved moral worth of humanity. If this becomes the case, a rejection of nuclear weapons as an option for mankind would be more easily achieved and the search for worthier alternatives to peace than nuclear weapons would be more strongly desired.

**Conclusion**

In this work I have articulated how it can be held that there are adequate bases for a world that would not promote the culture of nuclear weapon as an option for a world order. To do this, I provided some justification for the project.I then tried to provide proposals in this direction by arguing against the ideology of nuclear weapons and drawing from the African worldview as captured by the Nigerian philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti to formulate the basis for what I call progressive humanism. My effort to capture this (if adjudged to be successful) restates the case for searching for the solution to problems afflicting our world through the reservoir of diverse knowledge scattered all over the world and if this effort would drive the world away from a culture of threat as suggested by the nuclear weapon then this effort has been worthwhile.

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[1]*Among the list are :African Conflict and Peace building Review (ACPR); African Peace and Conflict Journal; Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice; African Journal of Conflict Resolution, In Factis Pax: Journal of Peace Education and Social Justice; International Journal on World Peace; International Peacekeeping; The Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict; Journal of Peace Education; Journal of Peace building and Development; Peace and Conflict Review; Peace building, etc.*

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