

MOVEMENT FOR COGNITIVE JUSTICE (MCJ)

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STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE AND THE PERSECUTION OF DISEMPOWERED CHRISTIANS AND OTHERS IN NIGERIA: ROOT-CAUSE AND SOLUTION – 01/01/2018

Kajit J Bagu (John Paul), PhD (Edinburgh)

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1 INTRODUCTION

The persecution of Christians in Nigeria, being a reflection of the persecution of other disempowered identities, is a reality with the character of structural injustice. In understanding this reality, it is crucial that MCJ's objective is towards finding an appropriate effective solution to a real structural and systemic problem. MCJ advances a solution for the benefit of the persecuted Christian, all other persecuted persons by virtue of faith or ethnic identity, and also for the benefit of those rendered default 'persecutors' by the system.

This brief presentation adopts a root-cause and historical perspective. It traces the contemporary and relentless persecution of Christians in Nigeria to a Medieval European ideology on the 'Negro' and Mohammedanism as articulated by Friedrich Hegel, the German Philosopher. It explains how this ideology was adopted and implemented as policy by the British colonial order, and is now part of the Nigerian post-colonial order. This paper outlines its manifestation as a form of dehumanising structural injustice backed by a constitutional, institutional framework, and requiring urgent systemic overhaul.

2 HEGEL'S 'NEGRO' THEORIES AND MOHAMMEDANISM: REMOTE HISTORICAL ROOT CAUSE

The persecution of Christians today as a form of structural injustice in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa, is rooted in a fairly distant medieval European ideology about the indigenous African as 'Negro'. This ideology is further traceable to Arab-Islamic prejudices developed and manifested in the centuries after the Muslim conquest of North Africa (640-709 AD), as evident from the sentiments in the writings of Arab-Muslim scholars from the period such as *Ibn Khaldun* (1332-1406). This became a European ideology, because European thinkers and policy-makers adopted Arab-Islamic sentiments and certain documentary sources and influences, especially when it came to the exploration of Africa, labelled 'the Dark Continent'. This was largely during trans-Atlantic slavery, shortly before the European colonisation of Africa. That ideological disposition, though prevalent in Europe at the time generally, was properly captured and given expression by Friedrich Hegel in his *Philosophy of History*, given as lectures between 1822 and 1830, first published in 1837. There, he made the following postulations about dealing with the 'Negro':

The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity in this type of character. The copious and circumstantial accounts of missionaries completely confirm this, and Mohammedanism appears to be the only thing which in any way brings the Negroes within the range of culture.

The sentiments captured in this quote have dominated and shaped the ideas underpinning the structural make-up of sub-Saharan Africa where Nigeria lies. In this philosophical framework, the 'Negro' is divested of everything 'humanity', and crucially, the path to bringing the 'Negro' into culture is identified as Mohammedanism or Islam. Islam is further designated the 'only' way for 'Negroes' to attain 'culture'. Hegel thus articulates the remote and historical root-cause of structural injustice that manifests today in Nigeria. In essence, the root cause of the persecution of Christians in Nigeria today, is the dehumanisation of the 'Negro' as a racial category, and his/her institutional subjugation to Islam as a religious category. This becomes clear within the

context of the connection between the dehumanised ‘Negro’ of historical European discourse, and the persecuted Christian of sub-Saharan Africa today. ‘This character’, as Hegel describes the ‘Negro’, is structurally maligned, because the European colonial and post-colonial structures in sub-Saharan Africa were, and are, to varying degrees, guided by the sentiments captured in Hegel’s articulations on the ‘Negro’.

3 RELIGION AND RACE: IN STRUCTURES OF EMPOWERMENT AND DEHUMANISATION

As did other European colonial powers to different degrees in Africa, Britain officially adopted, as an instrument of building socio-political order, a double-edged policy of using Islam on the one hand, and the principle of ‘higher than Negro races’/Islamised ethnic identities on the other, as rulers over ‘Pagan Negroes’. This was first in Northern Nigeria, and then Nigeria as a whole to different degrees. This policy disposition was repeatedly stressed by British colonial officials, especially Lord Frederick Lugard - the architect of Indirect Rule in Africa. This ethno-racial and religion-based principle of rule came to be written into the structures that became Nigeria under colonial and post-colonial structural, constitutional and institutional frameworks. Islam thus became more than a religion which, as with all religions, should be based upon freewill, but instead was made into an instrument of rule, of forging public institutions and a system in Northern Nigeria.

A few examples of restatements of this disposition include the following:

- a. ‘Every cause, natural and artificial alike has combined to the one end, of establishing the superior races in the northern and the inferior races in the southern portions of the fertile belt’
– Statement by Flora Shaw, the lady who coined the name ‘Nigeria’ statement in her book ‘A Tropical Dependency’, pg. 22;
- b. ‘... My desire to use the Fulani as rulers has been described in a former report and has met with the approval of the Secretary of State ...’
– Lord Lugard in his 1902 Annual Report of Northern Nigeria, pg. 84;

- c. ‘... The greatest check on this vice [domestically brewed alcoholic drinks and wines] is the creed of Islam, which forbids the use of intoxicants, and government can rely on the assistance of the Moslem Native Administrations in the Northern Provinces.’

– Lord Lugard in his 1919 Report on the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914, pg. 58;

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- d. ‘There is the faith and the law of Islam; there is a tribal grouping, the combination of the Fulani, the Hausa, the Nupe and the Kanuri, all formerly ruling tribes, most of whom have long been adherents of Islam ... there is a system of administration based on the Emir and a feudal pyramid below him- all these elements fusing to make what may for convenience be called the Northern System ... it is on these tribes and on Islam that the system and all that goes with it are based.’

– 1958 Report of the Willink Commission set-up to enquire into the fears of Minorities and ways of allaying them. Pgs. 52-53.

By the Muslim-based political philosophy and socio-political order founded thereupon, the subjugation of the non-Muslim or ‘Pagan Negro’ to religiously Muslim, and allegedly partly white ethnically Fulani (who claim to be a white immigrant race), or other Islamised ethnic identities, became structurally institutionalised. The other Islamised ethnic identities designated as co-rulers alongside, but less preferable to the Fulani, were the Hausa, Kanuri and Nupe.

With this ethno-racial and Muslim religion structural and institutional build-up in a country of over 700 ethnic groups and other faiths, the ‘Pagan’ and other non-Muslim ‘Negro’ was sentenced to perpetual structural violence, which has manifested in various unjust and brutal ways indicated shortly.

4 ISLAMIC COLONISATION OF POLITICAL POWER AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: PERIL OF ‘THE OTHER’

With the establishment of the Nigerian post-colonial state on the heels of British colonial policy of institutionalising Islam as a constituent of the system, the location of socio-political, and to some extent, economic power, became significantly subject to the faith and structures of Islam. In addition, the Muslim

religious structures in Northern Nigeria were elevated beyond the Sokoto Caliphate by the British, to the status of 'traditional institutions' beyond just Hausaland where the Muslim Emirate system had either taken root, or been systematically imposed. They were made part of Nigeria's constitutional and institutional architecture. Nigerian governments consequently assume direct responsibility for sustaining, funding and promoting Muslim religious structures and institutions in ways that prejudice non-Muslims negatively as 'other', who merely play 'catch-up'. It is this 'catch-up process' that led to the formation of a Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) as a form of refuge/resistance.

The result is a firm stranglehold of Islam over political power, as well as a particularly Muslim colonisation of designated ethnic identities in ways that brutally persecute members of those ethnic groups who may wish to become Christian or other forms of non-Muslims. This is because the 'traditional authorities' of those ethnic groups have been interweaved with the religion of Islam, and a religious leader called 'Emir' is also institutionally made the 'traditional leader' of same.

As a consequence, it is made constitutionally impossible for non-Muslim members of those ethnic groups to aspire to leadership of their ethnic groups and institutions therein, among other forms of disempowerment. These ethnic groups are first the self-professed 'partly white' non-African [immigrant] Fulani, and the indigenous and predominantly, but by no means wholly, Muslim Hausa, Kanuri and Nupe. A Fulani, Hausa, Nupe or Kanuri who is Christian or other forms of non-Muslim is therefore susceptible to persecution as an 'infidel' in the first instance. Other 700 ethnic groups over whom the ideology and system have been extended and similarly institutionalised over the decades also get persecuted, especially the 430 plus Middle-Belt nations, referred to in British colonial documents as 'the Pagan Belt'. Thus, the Nigerian system and constitution superficially claim secularity, but remain deeply infused with Islam as a religion which is indirectly recognised as state religion in the constitution.

As a consequence of the foregoing, the non-Muslim 'pagan' has been the subject, not only of structural exclusion, but quite often of brutal persecution and dehumanisation in many ways. It is at this juncture, and within this context, that the contemporary persecution of the Christian becomes manifest

as a symptom of a remote historical and phenomenal root-cause. That same dehumanised, excluded and much abused 'Pagan', is now largely, the persecuted Christian of Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa.

5 THE 'PAGAN NEGRO' OF HISTORY, THE PERSECUTED CHRISTIAN OF TODAY

The foregoing demonstrates how the 'Pagan Negro', having been dehumanised and despised in European medieval ideological leanings as influenced by Arab-Islamic sentiments, now becomes the subject of structural injustices, persecutions and dehumanisation as the Christian today. The pain today is seen, heard and deeply felt, but the structural foundations were laid by European actors, and in the fairly distant past.

From the first decade of British colonial rule in Nigeria, Christian missions made significant effort to win converts. These efforts were however restricted in Muslim communities particularly, but also in Northern Nigeria generally, which included populations that had resisted and rejected Islam. But they were subjugated to the rule of Muslim Emirs and Islamic law nonetheless. While the Christian missionaries were busy making converts through evangelism, Islam was being spread through the instruments of state power and its socio-economic fall-out as exemplified by the Premier of the Northern Region, whose undertakings were captured in 'Sir Ahmadu Bello' by John Paden. Restrictions placed on Christian evangelism was because the British government had undertaken to protect and institutionalise Muslim rule and Islam in politics and governance as early as 1902 after Sokoto's fall with attendant implications for non-Muslims. Discourse on this trend is adequately captured in the works of Lugard, Margery Perham and Charles Linsay Temple among others.

If the dehumanisation of the 'Negro' was encouraged and rendered invisible to Europe by virtue of the 'pagan' and 'savage' tags imposed under international order that emerged prior, and subsequent to the 1919 League of Nations Act, it has increasingly been made visible with the spread of Christianity among the same 'Negroes'. Muslims have thus been placed as 'default oppressors' thereby, a tag which often carries unpleasant consequences for many simple Muslims.

It must be recalled that it was Pope Paul III who warned European Christians in 1537, through the Papal Bull *Sublimus Deus*, not to regard 'Indians and other new peoples' as beasts of burden to be enslaved and dispossessed, because they were 'also human', had souls, and were 'capable of receiving Baptism.' Although the Pope was ignored for centuries, the effect today in sub-Saharan Africa is the structural persecution of the Christian, since Islam came to be entrenched as the path for the 'Negro'. The task of seeking, finding and implementing a solution to the structural injustices and attendant violence suffered by the Christian and others in Nigeria, Africa and indeed, the whole world, must now be addressed and redressed progressively and seriously.

Before outlining or indicating a way out, it is appropriate to indicate the patterns of some of the acts of persecution suffered by the Christian in Nigeria particularly.

6 MANIFESTATIONS/SYMPTOMS OF STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE: PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

The forms in which the structural persecution of Christians and non-Muslims manifest, include the following:

- a. Forced conversions to Islam;
- b. Kidnap of teenage girls, their forced conversion to Islam, and forced marriage with the active complicity of government-backed Muslim institutional structures;
- c. Attacks and mass killings of non-Muslim ethnic groups in their ancestral homelands by Fulani Muslim militia and herdsmen (bordering on genocide), and the forceful use of their crops and lands for grazing;
- d. Denial of recognition by way of admission to schools, indigene certifications, among others, to non-Muslim members of ethnic groups which are predominantly Muslim, and whose traditional institutions have been Islamised, with the people de-nationalised into Arab-Islamic national sentiments;
- e. Predisposition of the Muslim populace to plunge Nigeria into crises by 'making the country ungovernable' when a non-Muslim that does not succumb to Muslim control is in power;

- f. Wanton destruction of Christian places of worship and denial of lands for building churches and Christian religious institutions;
- g. Purposeful exclusion of Christians in appointments to public offices;
- h. Assassination and abduction of Christian traditional, religious and political leaders;
- i. Etc.

The list of incidents under these and other patterns is endless, and several databases indicating details of these manifestations are readily obtainable.

7 CONCLUSION: COGNITIVE JUSTICE PEACEBUILDING AS A SYSTEMIC SOLUTION

In conclusion, the solution to the problem lies in understanding the nature of the problem. The problem is not just about the persecuted Christians and other dehumanised non-Muslims in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa. It is also the attendant problem of positioning Islam and labelling Muslims generally as default oppressors of non-Muslims. Having outlined the philosophical basis of the problem, its historical travel-path or trajectory and its symptoms or manifestations, it becomes clear that the problem now assumes a structural, constitutional and institutional dimension.

In terms of assisting victims, it should be mentioned that the approach of providing charity, donations, church rebuilding, reliefs and other forms of support or reprieve to persecuted Christians does go a long way to help. Nevertheless, it does nothing to solve the problem effectively or systemically.

It is a systemic problem, and the only effective solution would therefore have to be systemic. Thus, it must be based on a sound normative and philosophical framework which entrenches a just order, and which will shape a new structural, constitutional and institutional order where all individuals are treated with full dignity, and all ethnic identities are constitutionally recognised and protected as equal. This holistic approach is necessary since no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it, as Einstein so rightly argued. This new level of consciousness is a necessity that has no place presently, hence the solution in Cognitive Justice Peacebuilding.

In clear terms, the unjust system and the ideals upon which it is founded call for a complete overhaul, and for strategic replacement with an order which guarantees every individual full human dignity, and every ethnic identity full recognition and protection. To be clear, the solution needed is not an uncritical European model of the secular Westphalian Nation-State, but a well thought-out framework that responds to the issues touched in diverse Africa.

On this note, MCJ has identified a contemporary research which contains a thought-out and well-articulated path to a solution. It is contained in a 2014 doctoral research which outlines the problem at different levels, and proposes a solution. This solution is captured in the expression ‘Cognitive Justice Peacebuilding’, defined as:

... the equal recognition and treatment of different identities in democratic constitutional society, with the aim of fostering peace through the elimination of legal, political, institutional, structural, social and economic inequality of different identities, whether such inequality be direct or indirect, express or implied, visible or invisible, and whether contemporary or historical. – (Bagu, 2014: 169).

The said research at the University of Edinburgh was titled: ‘Cognitive Justice, Plurinational Constitutionalism and Post-Colonial Peacebuilding: A Constitutional Philosophy on Identity; the Global South, Central Nigeria’. The propositions in that research contain the framework for the philosophical, structural, constitutional and institutional resolution and solution to the conditions that enhance the persecutions. It puts forth a path:

- From a philosophy of racism and ethnic exclusion to one of equality;
- From a philosophy of religion-centred state structures, to a philosophy of separation of state and faith;
- From structures of inequality to structures of equality;
- From a constitutional order of tacit identity elimination and ambiguity, to one of constitutional recognition and protection of diverse identities;
- From institutions subservient to discrimination, to institutions of consistency in policies of equality and social justice.

MCJ has a blueprint aimed at bringing this solution into fruition. To achieve this, MCJ proposes to have a Global Research Institute established, dedicated to perfecting and implementing the structural, constitutional and institutional solution needed. It is a capital intensive project which is nonetheless necessary. This autonomous global institute is a measure needed to take society to the level of consciousness necessary for the required transformation. The initiative needs the help and support of people of goodwill across the world, in order to tackle a specific and serious problem of global social justice. The task is significant but necessary if we must not surrender to fatalism.

The persecution and dehumanisation of the Christian and other non-Muslims in Nigeria and beyond will go on, as will the systemic positioning of Islam and Muslims as default oppressors (with the attendant unenviable attention and consequences it attracts, often no less brutal). This situation will persist until the required systemic transformation is attained. Humanity has the capacity, and more crucially, still has the goodwill to bring this about.

A Better World is Attainable!

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Authored by Kajit J. Bagu (John Paul) PhD (Edinburgh), who is also the initiator of MCJ. Initiated following discussions with Catholic Archbishop Kaduna, His Grace M.M. Ndagoso. The Author undertook a doctorate research at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and completed same in 2014. Prior to that, he completed an LL.M in International Development, Law and Human Rights (IDLHR) at the University of Warwick, Coventry in England, where he specialised in Human Rights and Globalisation with distinction. He is a lawyer in Nigeria and is author of articles and an upcoming book titled 'Pluriversalism: Cognitive Justice for Pluriversal World Order'. Reachable on johnpaulkajit@yahoo.co.uk Twitter: @jpkajit; Blog: www.pluriversity.blogspot.com

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