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Metaphysical Collapse: Kant, Necropolitics, and the Crisis of Value in Nigeria

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Abstract: This article examines Nigeria's current security nightmare through a specific philosophical lens, effectively mapping Immanuel Kant's theory of value onto Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics and Giorgio Agamben's notion of Homo Sacer. We often hear geopolitical analysts attributing the escalating violence in Nigeria (the mass kidnappings and the ethno-religious killings) to standard drivers like resource scarcity, environmental pressure, or just institutional weakness. But I would argue that these explanations, while perhaps factually grounded, fail to grasp the deeper nature of the crisis. It appears that what Nigeria is experiencing is not merely political instability, but a profound "metaphysical rupture": the replacement of a legal, juridical condition with an economy structured entirely around violence. By aligning Kant's distinction between dignity (Würde) and price (Preis) with the African moral philosophy of Ubuntu, this study suggests that the Nigerian human subject has been ontologically reclassified, downgraded from a bearer of intrinsic worth (Homo noumenon) to a monetizable object (Homo economicus) (Kant, 1785/1996 and Metz, 2014). I also employ Emmanuel Levinas's phenomenology of the Face to illuminate the ethical mechanics here, showing how the kidnapping economy operates through the systematic erasure of responsibility toward the Other. Finally, I conclude that the international community's refusal to recognise these atrocities as genocide constitutes a secondary form of "epistemic violence," one that tacitly legitimises the necropolitical authority of these non-state actors.

Keywords: Metaphysical Collapse, Necropolitics, Homo Sacer, Kantian Ethics, Dignity (Würde) vs. Price (Preis), Ubuntu, The Face (Levinas), Nigeria, Kidnapping Economy, Banditry, Genocidal Erasure, State Failure.

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1. Introduction: The Metaphysics of Collapse

In modern moral philosophy, few distinctions are as foundational as Immanuel Kant's separation of persons from things. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant articulates a principle that has since become central to human rights discourse: "In the kingdom of ends, everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; that which is raised above all price and admits of no equivalent has a dignity" (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:434). For Kant, the human being, insofar as they are a rational agent, possesses an intrinsic worth that is absolute, incomparable, and non-transferable. Consequently, assigning a market value to a human life is not simply immoral or illegal; it is a metaphysical error that violates the very structure of moral reality. The present

conditions within the Federal Republic of Nigeria, however, represent a stark empirical refutation of this Kantian moral ideal (Falola, 1998, p. 2). Across the forests of the North-West and the agrarian regions of the Middle Belt, the conceptual boundary separating persons from objects has not merely been crossed; it has been deliberately dismantled. A political economy has emerged in which human beings are systematically stripped of their noumenal status and reassigned fluctuating monetary values, determined by the ruthless calculus of supply, demand, and coercive leverage (Joab-Peterside & Zalik, 2009, p. 14).

Standard explanatory frameworks, such as state failure, poverty, or competition over resources, prove inadequate for interpreting this reality (Falola, 1998, p. 5). In his words: "To reduce the violence to economic determinism is to ignore the powerful role of religion in the definition of self and the construction of identity" (Falola, 1998, p. 7). To describe the mass abduction of schoolchildren or the targeted killing of clergy as mere "banditry" is itself a conceptual failure. Such language waters down the violence of its moral and metaphysical significance. This article advances the claim that Nigeria is undergoing a condition best described as *metaphysical collapse*. The state, which Kant regards as the institutional guarantor of the juridical condition necessary for freedom, has largely abdicated this responsibility. In the resulting vacuum, a new form of sovereignty has taken hold; one exercised by armed non-state actors. Drawing on the analysis of Sofiri Joab-Peterside and Anna Zalik (2009), this paper identifies an expanding process of violence commodification that has migrated from the oil-rich Niger Delta to the savannah regions of the North (Joab-Peterside & Zalik, 2009, p. 3). Yet a critical transformation has occurred: while Delta militancy commodified oil, contemporary banditry commodifies human life itself (Joab-Peterside & Zalik, 2009, p. 14). It is as if the machinery of extraction has switched its fuel source from fossil fuels to flesh.

The purpose of this study is to diagnose this condition as a form of moral pathology (Kant, 1793/1998, p. 6:32). It examines how Nigeria's kidnapping economy embodies the triumph of price over dignity, producing a hierarchy of human worth that fundamentally contradicts the principle of moral equality. Also, it investigates patterns of targeted annihilation (what may be described as genocidal erasure) where entire communities are not exploited for profit but eliminated (Agang, 2011, p. 15). By synthesising Kantian moral rationalism with Ubuntu's relational ethics, alongside the critical interventions of Mbembe's necropolitics and Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, this article moves beyond numerical accounts of violence to examine the ontological degradation at the heart of Nigeria's crisis.

2. The Kantian Structure: A Framework for Judgment

Any serious evaluation of Nigeria's present condition requires a clearly articulated normative benchmark. Diagnosis presupposes deviation, and deviation can only be measured against an established moral standard. Kant's moral philosophy is particularly well suited to this task because it does not merely propose ethical guidelines; it offers a systematic metaphysical account of human worth, moral agency, and political obligation. His framework enables us to distinguish contingent social failures from violations that strike at the very conditions of moral possibility. At the core of this framework lies a constructive distinction that structures Kant's entire moral system: the separation between what possesses dignity and what merely has a price. This distinction functions not only as an ethical principle but also as an ontological boundary, and its collapse would likely signal the beginning of the collapse of the moral sphere.

2.1 The Dichotomy of Value: *Würde* and *Preis*

The conceptual base of Kant's moral philosophy is the distinction between *Würde* (dignity) and *Preis* (price). This distinction operates within what Kant terms the *Kingdom of Ends* (*Reich der Zwecke*), which he defines explicitly as "a systematic union of various rational beings through common laws" (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:433). In such a community, value is not monolithic; it is categorically divided. On one side stands *price*. Price governs the realm of inclination (*Neigung*), utility, and exchange[36]. It applies to objects that serve human needs or satisfy desires. Kant offers a granular definition of how price functions, distinguishing between market value and aesthetic value: "Skill and diligence in work have a market

price (*Marktpreis*); wit, lively imagination and humor have a fancy price (*Affektpreis*)" (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:435). What unifies these forms of price is fungibility. Anything that has a price can be replaced with an assumed equivalent. Loss can be compensated; absence can be filled. The logic of price is thus the logic of exchange, replacement, and calculation (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:435).

Opposed to this is *dignity*. Dignity applies to morality itself, and to humanity insofar as it is capable of morality (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:435). Kant defines this special status by its lack of equivalency: "that which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself has not merely a relative worth, that is, a price, but an inner worth, that is, dignity" (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:435). Because human beings are capable of autonomy, that is, setting ends for themselves in accordance with reason, they cannot be assigned an equivalent. This means that there is no replacement for a rational agent because they are irreplaceable. To reduce a person to a means, whether for profit, security, or political convenience, is therefore not simply unjust; it constitutes a denial of their moral status. Holding a human being hostage for ransom exemplifies this violation with chilling clarity: the person is no longer regarded as an end, but as collateral.

2.2 Radical Evil and the Corruption of the Will

While the *Groundwork* does a fantastic job of outlining what the ideal moral life should look like, Kant's later writings had to grapple with the frustrating reality of why we keep failing to live up to it (Kant, 1793/1998, p. 6:19). In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), he introduces the concept of *radical evil* (*das radikale Böse*) to try and explain how rational beings can look the moral law in the face and still choose to violate it. For Kant, evil is not about being possessed by demons, and it certainly is not just about being stupid or irrational. Rather, it originates from a corruption in the very root of our decision-making. Unfortunately, this aligns with Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka's observation in a 2021 interview he granted the Guardian Newspaper that the banditry ravaging Nigeria is not mere chaotic madness, but a structured and conscious "determination to control... to the deprivation of the rest of society" (Soyinka, 2021, para. 3). In a passage that seems to speak directly to this cold, calculating rationality of the Nigerian bandit, Kant defines this perversion with surgical precision: "This evil is radical, because it corrupts the ground of all maxims... nevertheless, it must be possible for it to be overcome, because it is found in the human being as a freely acting being" (Kant, 1793/1998, p. 6:37).

Radical evil, then, is not the absence of reason; it is the subordination of duty to self-love (*Eigenliebe*). As Kant explains, the propensity to evil occurs when a human being "does indeed incorporate the moral law into his maxims... but he makes the incentives of self-love and its inclinations the condition of compliance with the moral law" (Kant, 1793/1998, p. 6:36). It reminds me of some structural engineers and contractors in Nigeria who know precisely how to build a bridge safely but decides to use substandard cement to pocket the difference in cost. They understand the physics (the law), but their greed (self-love) overrides the safety standards (duty), and the bridge collapses. In the Nigerian context, the political economy of banditry arguably represents a collective instantiation of this inverted moral order (Joab-Peterside & Zalik, 2009, p. 11). The bandit doesn't necessarily have to harbour a deep, burning hatred for his victim. What defines the act is the complete subordination of the victim's dignity to the perpetrator's inclination, usually just simple greed or strategic advantage. The kidnapped individual becomes a mere instrument, a biological lever that the bandit pulls to extract financial gain. This is instrumentalisation in its purest form: the use of a person as a tool or an instrument for the satisfaction of another's ends.

2.3 The Duty of the Civil Condition

Kant's moral philosophy doesn't stop at the level of individual ethics; it actually culminates in a theory of political obligation. In *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), he argues that remaining in a "state of nature" (a condition characterised by the absence of enforceable law) is not just dangerous; it is morally impermissible. "A state of nature is not a state of injustice... but it is a state devoid of justice (*status justitia vacuus*), in which when there is a dispute concerning rights (*ius controversum*), no competent

judge can be found to render a decision having the force of law" (Kant, 1797/1996, p. 6:312). Interestingly, he defines the state of nature as not purely characterised by violence but rather as merely lacking justice. Consequently, entering a civil condition is not an option you can take or leave; it is a categorical duty. Kant defines the *Civil Condition* as "a condition of the members of a multitude of human beings under public legal laws" (Kant, 1797/1996, p. 6:311). Only within such a juridical order can rights be secured and dignity recognised in the phenomenal world.

The fundamental purpose of the state, therefore, is not just to be benevolent or efficient, but to establish and maintain this juridical condition. When a state fails in this task, when it allows private violence to supersede public law, it ceases to function as the guarantor of rights. The citizens left behind in this vacuum suffer a fate that Hannah Arendt describes as: "The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness... but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever... We became aware of the existence of a right to have rights" (Arendt, 1951, p. 296). Nigeria's retreat from its monopoly on violence represents precisely this kind of failure. By allowing armed groups to control territory, extract ransoms, and dictate the terms of life and death, the state effectively reverts society to a state of nature. Citizens are no longer protected by law; they are exposed to unmediated force. In Kantian terms, this marks the collapse of the juridical condition and the opening of the political space to necropolitics, where power is exercised primarily through the management and distribution of death.

3. The Ontology of the Hostage: From Person to Asset Class

If Kant's *Kingdom of Ends* represents the moral ideal where persons are treated as ends in themselves, contemporary Nigeria increasingly presents its inversion: a social order structured around what I would call a *market of means*. The most visible and economically entrenched manifestation of this inversion is the massive expansion of the kidnap-for-ransom industry (SBM Intelligence, 2025, p. 2). This phenomenon is not just an accidental by-product of general insecurity; it appears to be a systematic economic arrangement that operates by explicitly rejecting dignity in favour of price. Within this system, human beings function as the primary commodity, while violence serves as the principal mechanism of extraction.

To really grasp the gravity of this transformation, I don't think it's enough to just catalogue individual crimes. What demands philosophical attention is the industrialisation of abduction itself. As SBM Intelligence observes, kidnapping in Nigeria has evolved from sporadic, opportunistic acts into a structured and profit-driven sector of the informal economy (SBM Intelligence, 2025, p. 2). At this point, the metaphysical implication becomes unavoidable: the Nigerian citizen is no longer encountered as a bearer of rights, but as a unit of inventory whose value fluctuates according to everyday market logic.

3.1 The Industrialisation of the Human Asset

The available data reads like a balance sheet of moral collapse. Between July 2024 and June 2025, at least 4,722 individuals were abducted in 997 separate incidents across Nigeria (SBM Intelligence, 2025, p. 2). These figures do not merely quantify criminal activity; they record the large-scale conversion of human freedom into liquid capital. Ransom demands within this twelve-month period reached approximately 48 billion naira, equivalent to roughly 30 million US dollars (SBM Intelligence, 2025, p. 3). In practical terms, the human body seems to have replaced natural resources as the most readily monetizable asset in significant parts of Nigeria's hinterlands. This development confirms and extends the analysis offered by Joab-Peterside and Zalik regarding the commodification of violence in the Niger Delta. In the Delta, violence served as leverage to access oil wealth. In northern Nigeria, the logic has been refined: human beings themselves have become the resource.

This shift recalls the searing indictment of colonial commodification by Aimé Césaire. While Césaire was writing about the colonial encounter, his description of "thingification" haunts the Nigerian forest today: "I am talking about societies drained of their essence... I am talking about millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement" (Césaire,

1955, p. 43). In Nigeria, this "injection of fear" is not metaphorical; it is the precise mechanism that transmutes a citizen into a negotiable asset. To concretize this, one need only look at the chilling "marketing" strategies employed by the perpetrators of the Abuja-Kaduna train attack. In April 2022, the terrorists released a photograph of a baby girl delivered in their den by an abducted passenger. This image was not shared for celebration or out of pity; it was released as a 'proof of inventory', a calculated move to inject fresh terror into the families and the state. By showcasing the most vulnerable form of human life as a captive asset, they take advantage of the moral vulnerability of the public to expedite payment. The victim is no longer collateral damage in a struggle over resources; the victim is the resource.

3.2 Agamben and the Zone of Exception: The Hostage as *Homo Sacer*

To properly get a handle on the political status of these thousands of abducted individuals, I find Giorgio Agamben's concept of *Homo Sacer* to be indispensable. In his work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben uncovers a figure from obscure Roman law who exists as "bare life", life that is biologically ongoing but stripped of all legal or political protection. The Nigerian hostage arguably exemplifies this condition. The ungoverned forests of the North-West seem to operate as "zones of exception," spaces where the normal rule of law is simply suspended. However, Agamben's definition of the "ban" helps us understand that this is not just about being far away from a police station. It is a specific ontological relation: "He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it, but rather abandoned by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable" (Agamben, 1998, p. 28).

It is somewhat like stepping into a gladiator arena where the laws of the city outside the walls no longer apply; once an individual is dragged from their village or school into the bush, they cross this metaphysical boundary. They are "abandoned" by the law, yet remain subject to a power of death. Within this zone, sovereignty belongs not to the Nigerian state but to the armed captor. The state's behaviour, which usually takes one of the following forms: abandoning rescue operations, facilitating ransom payments, or striking "amnesty" deals, indirectly acknowledges this transfer of sovereignty. The hostage is treated as *Homo Sacer*, that is, a life that can be expended, traded, or discarded without triggering the full moral and legal weight of homicide (Agamben, 1998, p. 83). To put it in Kantian terms: a life that lacks dignity.

3.3 The Tariff of Existence and the Obliteration of the Face

Perhaps the most profound affront to Kant's conception of dignity is the emergence of an informal but highly structured pricing system for human life. Kant insisted that dignity admits of no equivalent, that every rational being possesses equal and incomparable worth (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:434). The kidnapping economy directly contradicts this principle by constructing a hierarchy of value based on social status, perceived wealth, and the symbolic significance of the victim (SBM Intelligence, 2025, p. 5). What emerges is a perverse "tariff of existence," where expatriates command millions of dollars ("Luxury Commodity"), clergy are weaponised for their communal value ("Institutional Asset"), and villagers are traded for motorcycles ("Volume Commodity"). This pricing system requires a fundamental ethical transformation. Here, Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy becomes useful. Levinas argues that ethics originates in the encounter with the "Face of the Other," an encounter that issues an immediate moral demand. However, Levinas also captures the terrible fragility of this demand. In *Ethics and Infinity*, he notes that, "The face is exposed, menacing, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill... The face is the signification of the Infinite" (Levinas, 1985, p. 86).

The kidnapping economy survives by neutralising this paradox. It leans into the "exposure" while silencing the "forbidding." The price list functions as an ethical shield. When the captor perceives a priest as "fifty million naira" rather than as a human being, the moral claim of the Face is effectively silenced (Levinas, 1969, p. 199). This explains the operational practices of kidnapping networks, which include phone negotiations, blindfolds, and anonymity. Physical distance is not incidental; it is necessary. It's

similar to how drone operators are removed from the battlefield; the technology creates a buffer that sanitises the act. The continued functioning of the economy of price depends on preventing the epiphany of the Face; the moment of sudden awakening that might reveal a truth, principle or aspect of reality that, if acknowledged, could disrupt the current practice or perception of value.

4. The Metaphysics of Erasure: Beyond the Logic of Price

If the kidnapping economy represents the reduction of dignity to price, the violence unfolding across Nigeria's Middle Belt and other parts of the country signals something even more severe. Here, the objective is not to exploit the victim economically but to eliminate them altogether. Whereas the bandit requires the victim to remain alive long enough to generate profit, the genocidal actor seeks the permanent disappearance of the victim and, by extension, the community to which they belong. This distinction forces a reconsideration of explanatory narratives that frame the violence as symmetrical "farmer–herder clashes" driven primarily by environmental pressures or land competition. A philosophical engagement with available evidence suggests that such narratives obscure more than they illuminate. As Sunday Bobai Agang argues, we must recognise the theological stakes of this erasure. In his words: "The destruction of human life is a destruction of the *imago Dei* (image of God)...To kill a human being is to attack the very image of God, for every human being is created in the *imago Dei*" (Agang, 2011, p. 25). What is at stake here, therefore, is not distributive justice regarding land use, but ontological survival.

4.1 Intent to Annihilate: Distinguishing Banditry from Genocide

Debates surrounding the applicability of the term *genocide* in Nigeria frequently become stalled at the level of numerical borders: how many bodies constitute a genocide? Yet from a Kantian perspective, moral evaluation hinges not solely on outcomes, but on the maxim governing the action (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:421). Banditry operates on a maxim of instrumentalisation: *I will use this person as a means to secure financial gain*. Genocidal violence, by contrast, operates on a maxim of negation: *This group must be removed to purify or reclaim space*. The former degrades dignity by reducing it to a price; the latter denies dignity outright by refusing the group's right to exist.

Reports by advocacy bodies such as Christian Solidarity International and the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group indicate recurring patterns of targeted destruction that exceed the logic of resource competition (APPG, 2020, p. 12). Attacks attributed to Fulani militias frequently involve the burning of churches, the killing of clergy, and the symbolic renaming of conquered territories. These acts are not economically rational within the narrow frame of land-use disputes; they function as acts of world-destruction. To situate this, we need look no further than the "toponymicide" (the deliberate killing of place names) that has unfolded in Plateau State. In 2018, legislators, including Hon. Peter Gyendeng, raised the alarm that over 50 villages in the Barkin Ladi and Riyom Local Government Areas had not merely been sacked, but permanently occupied and renamed (International Crisis Group, 2018, p. 9). For instance, the indigenous village of *Gana Ropp* was renamed *Rotchun*. Violent displacement was immediately followed by bureaucratic erasure. This specific act dismantles the "resource competition" narrative entirely. Cattle do not care what a village is called. A cow grazes on grass regardless of whether the land is named *Gwol* or *Sho.* The only reason to rename a conquered territory is to assert a new sovereignty and to erase the memory that the previous inhabitants ever existed. This is not the economics of grazing; it is the metaphysics of conquest. Sokfa John describes this condition as one of "lived erasure," in which victims experience not only physical violence but the systematic denial of their place within the social and moral order (John, 2018, p. 38).

4.2 The Kantian Limit: Individual Autonomy and Collective Destruction

Kant's moral philosophy is famously grounded in the idea of individual autonomy; fundamentally, a person possesses worth because they are capable of "self-legislation" under the moral law (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:436). While this framework powerfully explains the wrongness of killing an individual, I would argue it encounters significant difficulty when faced with the specific logic of genocide. Genocidal

violence doesn't really target individuals primarily as moral agents; rather, it targets them as bearers of a particular identity. People are killed not for what they have done, but essentially for who they are. In these scenarios, entire communities are targeted for destruction, meaning the harm inflicted seems to exceed the simple aggregation of individual murders. It is not just about the body count; languages are silenced, rituals are disrupted, and historical continuity is broken. It is a bit like the difference between burning a single book and burning down the entire library; the former destroys a specific text, but the latter destroys the very mechanism of cultural transmission.

To fully grasp this, let us move beyond Western metaphors of libraries and books. In many African traditions, the death of an elder is often equated to a library burning down; but the destruction of an entire community is something far worse, it is akin to uprooting the Baobab tree under which the elders sit. When you cut down a single branch (an individual murder), the tree can weep sap and eventually heal. But when you uproot the Baobab, you do not just kill the wood; you destroy the meeting place. You eliminate the shade where disputes were settled, where history was recited, and where the ancestors were invoked. The violence of the Middle Belt is not just deforestation; it is the systematic uprooting of these "meeting places" of identity. It breaks the chain of oral transmission that links the unborn to the ancestors, rendering the survivors not just homeless, but historically adrift.

4.3 Ubuntu as Corrective: Relational Dignity and the Double Violation

This is where the African philosophy of Ubuntu provides what appears to be a crucial corrective. Often encapsulated in the expression *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, (roughly translating to "a person is a person through other persons"), Ubuntu locates human worth within networks of relationship and communal belonging (Metz, 2014, p. 533). When applied to the Nigerian context, Ubuntu allows us to diagnose what may be described as a *double violation* of dignity (Metz, 2014, p. 540). First, there is the *Kantian violation*: individuals are stripped of autonomy and treated as expendable objects (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:434). Second, there is the *Ubuntu violation*: the communal matrix that constitutes personhood is dismantled.

When villages are destroyed and survivors are scattered into camps, the relational fabric that sustains identity collapses. The survivors endure what I would call "ontological amputation." They remain biologically alive, yet the collective "we" through which their lives derived meaning has been erased. This is why the language of "communal clashes" is philosophically untenable; it falsely implies a symmetrical conflict between comparable groups. In reality, what appears to be unfolding is the systematic dismantling of the Ubuntu of specific indigenous communities. Stripped of Kantian legal protection and Ubuntu relational dignity, displaced persons are reduced to bare life, existing physically, yet excluded from the moral and political map of the nation

5. The Epistemology of Denial: Why the Blood Remains Unseen

If the Nigerian crisis constitutes a double violation of dignity (both individual and communal), a pressing question arises: why does this reality persistently go unrecognised by the international community? Why do official reports from institutions such as the United States Department of State or the United Kingdom’s Foreign Office continue to describe the systematic destruction of religious communities as "farmer–herder clashes" or climate-induced conflict? This failure cannot be explained solely by diplomatic caution or political expediency. At a deeper level, it reflects an epistemological breakdown, a failure of perception and interpretation. To clear this fog, it is necessary to examine the conceptual frameworks through which violence is rendered intelligible. In this regard, the work of political theologian William Cavanaugh leads to an essential access point.

5.1 The Myth of Secular Violence

In *The Myth of Religious Violence*, Cavanaugh argues that modern Western political thought rests on an artificial and deeply consequential distinction. In his words:

There is no transhistorical or transcultural essence of religion... The attempt to create a transhistorical definition of religion is a part of the myth of religious violence... The myth of religious violence serves to cast the secular state as the peacemaker that rescues us from the violence of religion (Cavanaugh, 2009, p. 4).

When this framework is applied to Nigeria, it produces systematic misrecognition. Observers see Fulani militias attacking predominantly Christian villages and, because the violence involves land, cattle, and migration, they instinctively classify it as secular conflict rooted in resource scarcity. The possibility that the violence might be theologically motivated by hostility toward a religious identity is effectively ruled out in advance. To acknowledge such a motive would challenge the comforting assumption that modernity has outgrown religiously driven mass violence.

Cavanaugh notes that the myth of religious violence functions politically by legitimising the state's monopoly on force, presenting the state as a rational arbiter restraining irrational actors (Cavanaugh, 2009, p. 230). In Nigeria, however, this myth operates as a mechanism of denial. By reframing identity-based violence as climate-driven conflict, international actors override the testimonies of victims themselves. Survivors insist they are targeted because of who they are. Diplomatic discourse responds by attributing their suffering to environmental change. This substitution constitutes a form of epistemic violence, an injury inflicted not on bodies, but on meaning. The victims are denied the authority to name their own suffering.

5.2 Necropolitics and the Logic of the Suicide Pact

If the international community's blindness is structured by secular epistemology, the paralysis of the Nigerian state is better understood through Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics. Classical political theory associates sovereignty with the power to preserve life. Mbembe challenges this assumption, arguing that in postcolonial contexts, sovereignty often manifests as the power to dictate exposure to death. In Nigeria, the state has increasingly withdrawn from its Kantian obligation to uphold the juridical condition. In its place, a form of necropolitical governance has emerged, marked by negotiation with death. When governors publicly meet with bandit leaders, when ransom payments are normalised, or when temporary "amnesty" arrangements are struck, the state is not resolving violence; it is commodifying it. Mbembe describes necropower as the subjugation of life to the calculus of death (Mbembe, 2003, p. 39).

Under such conditions, citizenship loses its protective function. The individual is no longer a bearer of enforceable rights, but a participant in a "necropolitical lottery." Safety is not guaranteed; it is bargained for. The social contract, traditionally understood as an exchange of obedience for protection, degenerates into what can only be described as a suicide pact. Citizens continue to obey a state that has tacitly accepted their disposability. The juridical condition collapses, replaced by a system in which the state serves merely as an intermediary between the citizen and their potential executioner.

5.3 Moral Injury and the Ethics of Complicity

Beyond the high-level structural analysis, this system exacts a devastating psychological and moral toll on ordinary citizens. I find the concept of *moral injury*, originally developed in studies of combat trauma, to be beneficial here. According to the clinical psychiatrist, Jonathan Shay (2014), "Moral injury is the betrayal of what's right, by someone who holds legitimate authority, in a high stakes situation" (p. 182). It arises when individuals are forced to act in ways that fundamentally violate their own moral convictions. In Nigeria, families of abducted persons are routinely placed in what is essentially an impossible dilemma. The state fails to conduct rescues, leaving ransom payment as the only viable option. Yet, paying the ransom directly funds the same networks that will likely abduct someone else tomorrow. Families are thus compelled to become unwilling participants in the economy of violence.

A harrowing instantiation of this occurred during the Greenfield University kidnapping in Kaduna State in 2021. While the state government maintained a rigid "no negotiation" policy to discourage the

industry, the bandits responded by executing five students to prove their resolve. The parents were left in a moral abyss: adhere to the state's principle and watch their remaining children die, or bypass the state to fund the murderers. As expected, the parents chose survival. They collectively raised and paid over 180 million naira (and purchased ten motorcycles) to secure the release of the remaining students. In the aftermath, the admission by the parents was heart-wrenching: they effectively acknowledged that they had funded the armoury of the terrorists (Eremosele, F., 2021). This is the essence of the moral injury: being forced to purchase your child's life with the currency of future violence. Society becomes populated not only by victims, but by traumatised accomplices, individuals who know they have financed their own continued insecurity. It is like being forced to buy the bullets for the gun pointed at your head. This is the quiet corrosion of moral life under necropolitical conditions.

5.4 The Politics of Naming: Why "Genocide" Remains Unspeakable

The persistent refusal to apply the term *genocide* to Nigeria's crisis demands particular scrutiny. As Mahmood Mamdani observes in his analysis of Darfur, the application of this specific word is never neutral. It acts as a switch that fundamentally alters the political landscape. According to him, "The controversy is not about the facts of violence... It is about the *politics of naming*... To name it genocide is to mobilize 'international community' for intervention... It is a description that is also a call to arms" (Mamdani, 2009, p. 6). Consequently, the avoidance of the term functions as a strategy of containment. By classifying the violence as "banditry," "communal conflict," or "law-and-order challenges," international actors relegate it to the domain of domestic governance. This framing permits continued diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and security partnerships with Abuja without the burdens of humanitarian intervention.

Crucially, this "politics of naming" is not merely a passive diplomatic habit; the Nigerian state itself actively enforces it. The Federal Government has consistently deployed what I would call a "rhetorical firewall" to block the usage of the term. For instance, when the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) warned in 2020 that the violence was evolving into a "precursor to genocide," the government actively dismissed the findings, insisting that the conflict was purely resource-driven (All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief [APPG], 2020, p. 12). More recently, in late 2025, the Attorney General of the Federation publicly "rejected claims of a targeted Christian genocide," maintaining that the government was "winning the fight against banditry" and that the victims were indiscriminate (APPG, 2020, p. 12). In both instances, the state effectively weaponises the "secular violence" myth (discussed in 5.1). By insisting that the drivers are economic (farming) or criminal (banditry), they strip the violence of the *intent* required for a genocide classification.

Mamdani describes this as the *politics of naming*, where labels determine not only how events are understood but also how urgently they demand a response. In the Nigerian case, the choice of euphemism has enabled global indifference. The price of diplomatic stability is paid through silence about the erasure of entire communities. What is denied is not merely a word, but the moral reality the word discloses.

6. Conclusion: The Imperative of the Moral State

The Nigerian crisis exposes, with unsettling clarity, the fragility of what is often assumed to be an unassailable fact: the human status itself. While biology renders one a member of the species, Kant reminds us that humanity, in the moral sense, is a status conferred and sustained through law, recognition, and ethical commitment. When the distinction between person and thing collapses, the descent into barbarism is neither gradual nor partial; it is comprehensive. This article has argued that Nigeria's moral order has undergone a profound inversion. The Kantian *Kingdom of Ends*, in which persons exist as bearers of dignity, has been displaced by a *market of violence* in which human life circulates as a monetizable asset. Within this market, the priest, the student, and the farmer are no longer encountered as ends in themselves, but as variables in a calculus of ransom, leverage, and disposability. The kidnapping economy exemplifies the triumph of radical evil, not through ideological fanaticism, but through the banal subordination of human worth to profit. At the same time, the targeted destruction of Christian and

indigenous communities in the Middle Belt represents a deeper ontological rupture: a double violation that erases both the autonomous individual and the relational community articulated by Ubuntu.

At the centre of this tragedy lies the conduct of the Nigerian state. Kant's political philosophy assigns the state a singular moral purpose: to compel the transition from the state of nature to a civil condition in which rights are publicly secured (Kant, 1797/1996, p. 6:312). The legitimacy of political authority rests solely on this function. When a state fails to protect citizens from private violence, it does not merely malfunction; it forfeits its definition. Here, the famous definition provided by Max Weber serves as the final, damning criterion. In *Politics as a Vocation*, Weber asserts: "A state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber, 1919/1946, p. 78). The parenthetical qualifier (successfully) is the pivot upon which the Nigerian state is currently faltering. By tolerating ransom economies, negotiating with armed groups, and responding selectively to mass atrocities, the Nigerian state has surrendered this monopoly not to law, but to commerce. In doing so, the social contract has been phased out. In its place is what appears to be an inhuman arrangement in which citizens continue to obey a state that has implicitly accepted their fungibility. A situation where citizens are expected to hold on to their own part of the contractual bargain, but the state is not; obedience is maintained, but protection is no longer guaranteed. As I noted earlier, the contract mutates into a suicide pact.

Any meaningful response to Nigeria's crisis must therefore exceed technical fixes or military escalation. The problem is not simply inadequate policing or insufficient firepower. It is metaphysical. Resolution requires the restoration of the juridical condition that makes moral life possible. This demands a decisive shift from security-centric containment toward a genuinely Kantian, human-rights-based political order, one that recognises the human subject as an end in itself, not as a negotiable variable (Kant, 1785/1996, p. 4:433). Such restoration entails several imperatives. First, the state must cease negotiating with death. Amnesty arrangements and ransom facilitation normalize the economy of price and entrench the commodification of human life. Second, the financial infrastructures sustaining banditry must be dismantled, not merely to protect revenue, but to demonetise the human person. Third, the violence must be named truthfully. Genocide, religious persecution, and systematic erasure are not inflammatory terms; they are diagnostic ones. Naming should be seen not as a rhetorical excess, but as the first act of moral repair.

Finally, Nigeria's recovery depends on rearticulating political life through the relational wisdom of Ubuntu. Dignity is not an isolated possession. It is shared, sustained, and mutually vulnerable. When one person is reduced to a price, all are diminished. When one community is erased, the moral fabric of the nation frays. Only by affirming the infinite, non-fungible worth of every victim, that is, by seeing each as a *Homo noumenon* rather than a statistic, a resource, or a liability, can Nigeria begin to emerge from its present moral night.

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