

The Problem of Hate Speech in Nigerian Democratic Experience: A Philosophical Appraisal

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Abstract

There is no doubt that one of the essential attributes of democracy is freedom of the press. It is predicated on the background or foundation of fundamental human rights which a democratic government purports to protect. It is, however, important to note that hate speech is indeed a signature in contemporary Nigerian society which is basically multicultural and pluralistic. This paper, therefore, examines the nature and character of hate speech and its implications for contemporary Nigerian body-politic. It adopts qualitative research method and is highly analytical. It serves as a veritable guide for addressing fundamental issues of defamation, libel, sedition, slander, obscene publications, amongst other contemporary issues in media ethics. It concludes that hate speech is indeed a bane militating against the practice of democratic governance in contemporary Nigerian state. It recommends that the National Assembly and other law-making bodies in Nigeria should enact laws that will checkmate the rising spate of hate speech in Nigeria.

Keywords: Problem, Hate, Speech, Nigeria, Democratic, Experience, Philosophical, Appraisal

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Introduction

This paper examines the problem of hate speech in the Nigerian democratic experience vis-à-vis her historical background cultural diversity and political landscape or trajectory. The manifestation of this socio-ethical vice or menace has become more pervasive and has become increasingly alarming in the recent time. This is partly as a result of absence of effective mechanisms or strategy for checkmating it.

It is also germane to stress that hate speech which has assumed a definitive form more than ever before under this present Buhari-led administration contributes significantly to fuelling the embers of resentment, ethnic bigotry or tribal sentiment, religious intolerance, killings e.g Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, shitti unrest in Southern Kaduna, amongst other forms of ethnic or politically motivated killings in Nigeria.

It is now a common issue to unleash abuses in the forms of derogatory remarks or unguided utterances to rival politicking or perceived political detractors on social media platforms such as face book, twitter, 2go, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.

What does Hate Speech Consists?

The term hate speech is conceptualized as any act of self-experience toward another individual or a cooperate entity that is offensive in his Hate Speech and Electoral evidence in Nigeria, C. Ezeibe postulates that "Hate speech is any speech, gesture, conduct writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Hate speeches impinge on the dignity and integrity of others because it is completely hate-oriented or hate motivated with it, unnecessary

expressions are cast on targeted victims to smear their well-esteemed identity. Hate speeches displays an undue sense of superiority that prioritize outright inequality/ such speeches threaten the psychological boundaries of those who would otherwise opt for the non-violation of the tranquility in such territories. Unfortunately, in some cases, such speeches, tune out to be a well organized means of justifying hatred for the other.

In all ramifications, hate speech are very harmful. Fundamentally, hate speeches exemplify the wrong use of words. This is because words are tools for communication and dialogue. When a tool is offensively used, it becomes a weapon. This is what happens to words. They are in every hate speech employed as weaponized tools, which is indeed an aberration, since it is an abuse of the noble-tool that a word represents. Many factors are motivatory to hate speeches. Some of them are-lack of tolerance, political racialism, discriminatory sentiments, enmity and unhealthy competition. This must be guarded against by individuals and fought quarterly by the government in which it belongs to maintain law and order

Effects of Hate Speech on Nigeria's Democracy

The hurt people feel from listening to hate speech can hardly be measured. In the view of Nnadozie, cognitive dissonances, at times, do occur in the minds of victims. On the one hand they believe that they are entitled to their dignity and personhood, on the other hand, they cannot reconcile this belief with their experience of what has happened to them. Very painful experiences resulting from any form of hate speech leave marks such as trauma, resentment, humiliation, bitterness, mistrust and vengeful feelings. Some also feel being hunted at times or being unfortunate victims. Within this situation, the victim might feel his dignity as a person is impinged upon or badly violated. Now, pondering on this condition, Anthony Bash says:

The question has to do with making a sense of — that is finding out, the reason for — what happened to them. Those who already have low self-esteem (that is, a misplaced or diminished sense of self-regard, self-confidence and self-respect and an inaccurate perception of themselves as rational and relational human beings) may find it particularly difficult to forgive or may 'forgive' all too easily out of a lack of self-respect. With some types of wrongdoing, the victim may feel that the wrongdoer is implicitly communicating that the victim is worthless, a 'thing' (not a person) to be abused at will.

In this wise, Martin Buber talks about the Primary Word which could either enhance or diminish the dignity of another human being. In a relationship devoid of respect, primary word of I-it is employed. According to Martin Buber, "I once made up the word "Vergening"- mismeeting," or 'miscounter"- to designate the failure of a real between men.

The hate speeches that have a strong connection with Buber's primary Word of I-it denote a subject-object relationship, a world of ordered objectivity and private subjectivity of man to the I-it-world include experience, which constitutes the world Buber writes:

I-it is the primary word of experiencing and usage. It takes place within a man and not between him and the world. Hence, it is entirely subjective and lacking in mutuality. Whether in knowing, feeling or acting, it is the typical subject-object relationship.

While the world of I-Thou is of true personalities, the world of I-It is radically different. It is noteworthy, that the primary word of I-It points to a relation of a person a thing, of subject to object involving some form of utilization, domination or control. In this relationship man lives in time and space with a distinct border between each individual and man. Unlike the I-Thou, the I-It relation does not involve the whole being. In the world of 'It' man's orientation towards reality:

life, objects and fellowmen is that of manipulation, as something to be weighed, measured, categorized and controlled to serve man's purposes.

The aforesaid relation lacks reciprocity and mutuality but rather things are encountered as means to some desired ends. I-It objectifies an I-Thou relation and also serves as an avenue back to the it-mode. In the I-it dimension, our concern is to arrange and organize, to manage and turn things to practical account. Exploitation, discrimination, prejudice, victimization abound in this mode of relation. According to Martin Buber, creativity and development - science and technology, commerce and industry - are possible only in the I-Thou relation, but if he lives only in this world he is not a man.

This is why hate speeches were, *ab initio*, described as very harmful. The intention is to humiliate, depersonify, objectify or even thingify the distinctive uniqueness of another human being or an entity. Being grievously wronged especially, hate speeches can be a psychologically destructive experience for the victim which translate into psychopathological and dysfunctional behaviors if not remedied in. Although some people who have been wronged recover quickly from their psychological wounds, others may show external behavioral signs and symptoms of (severe or mild) psychological disorders ranging from PTSD (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder) to Anxiety Disorders and Panic Attacks and Panic Disorders.

Any lack of psychological recovery can breathe feelings of phobia, pain, frustration, panic and great anxiety. Victims try to avoid areas where such embarrassing events or speeches had taken place including the perceived victimizers. In some cases, the effects of the hurt might be so overwhelming that victims yield to the impulse of erasing such memories with the help of drugs, tobacco and alcoholism. However, at its worst, the victim's depression can make him consider the possibility of terminating his life if he does not see reasons to hold on to life.

There exist an interlacing relationship between the human physical nature and the psychological. Due to this fact, any hurtful expression that staggers the human mind to grief can spill over to influencing the overall functionality of the body. For instance, when people are inappropriately tongue-lashed or bad mouthed the marks of emotional effects are left on the victims. The effects include the sense of shame, guilt, humiliation, hurtful feelings, fear, terror, dread, resentment, bitterness, vengeful feelings, grudges, mistrust, doubt, surprise, distrust, suspicion, disbelief, hostility, animosity, hatred and many other negative feelings and emotions.

Thus, the science of Psychoneuroimmunology (i.e., the study of the interaction between psychological processes and the nervous and immune systems of the human body) has demonstrated the link between stress and disease. Stressors produce profound health consequences. Experts hold that stressful thoughts, feelings and emotions (e.g., anger, resentment, inability to forgive, hatred, etc) trigger electrical impulses which, in their turn, induce biochemical changes that cause psycho-physical imbalances which ultimately impair our immune function. Under normal circumstances the biochemical changes that normal stress brings about in the body are beneficial, if they are of limited duration: because they prepare us meet emergency situation. When these high voltage chemicals are produced by these changes on an on-going basis on account of chronic stress, and when they are not used up by the body, they produce inner disharmony. Invariably, the immune system of the body is negatively affected, thereby encouraging the thriving of disease therein.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored the concept of hate speech Nigeria's democratic culture in this discourse, we have argued that hate speech, is injurious to the core values of democratic governance in Nigeria. It makes a case that there should be legislations to ban or forestall hate speech in Nigeria's democratic society.

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