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The negative security impacts of hate speech in Nigeria

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Most conflicts in Nigeria are consequences of hate speech, marginalization and divisions along religious and ethnic lines. Using qualitative content analysis, this paper sets out to highlight cases of hate speech and the consequent impact on peace in Nigeria and on its peacekeeping efforts. Results show the dangerous role of the media in broadcasting hate speech and its contagious multiplier effects: the impunity of traditional rulers; the failure of effective prosecution and the need to temporarily withdraw Nigerian troops from peacekeeping missions. It further makes recommendations towards ideas on how Nigeria could effectively address the underlying issues towards preventing hate crime and achieving better conflict resolution mechanisms.

KEYWORDS: hate speech, Nigeria, conflict resolution, electoral violence

A gyűlöletbeszéd negatív biztonsági hatásai Nigériában

A legtöbb konfliktus Nigériában a gyűlöletbeszéd, a marginalizáció és a vallási és etnikai alapon történő megosztottság következménye. A tanulmány a kvalitatív tartalomelemzés segítségével rávilágít a gyűlöletbeszéd eseteire és az ebből fakadó, a nigériai belpolitikára és az ország békeműveleti tevékenységére gyakorolt hatásokra. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a média veszélyes szerepet játszik a gyűlöletbeszéd terjesztésében és annak rosszirányú multiplikátor hatásaiban; az uralkodói elit büntetlenségének látszatát kelti; gátolja a hatékony bűnüldözését, és gyakran oka a nigériai csapatok békefenntartó missziókból való ideiglenes kivonásának. A tanulmány ajánlásokat is megfogalmaz arra vonatkozóan, hogy Nigéria hogyan tudná hatékonyan kezelni a gyűlölet-bűncselekmények megelőzése és a jobb konfliktus-megoldási mechanizmusok elérése érdekében a felmerülő problémákat.

KULCSSZAVAK: gyűlöletbeszéd, Nigéria, konfliktuskezelés, választási erőszak

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The quality of our lives depends not on whether or not we have conflicts, but on how we respond to them.
(Thomas Crum)

Introduction

Hate speech is an intentional action to hurt the emotions of the other person without restraint. It is a precursor to conflict and it is so partial that it does not warrant the consent of the victim. While the elements of peacekeeping must include consent, impartiality and non-use of force, hate speech does not recognize this. Depending on the exigencies, peacekeeping now includes small unarmed ceasefire observer missions and large-scale multidimensional missions. On the other hand, the consequences of hate speech could lead to bloody reactions between individuals or groups, with no restrictions on the methods of fighting. This situation summarizes the research question of this article.

According to Jeremy Waldron² the harm is not *caused* by the speech, but the speech itself *constitutes* the harm. The distinction between how speech causes harm and how speech constitutes the harm, calls for examination. In totality, we believe that as far as the intention is to inflict psychological assault on the dignity of another person, both the context and the act to utter such a speech is what constitutes hate speech. This tangible verbal action is what empowers the victim to initiate a consequentialist claim in the court of law. In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly (NGA) adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 19 of the UDHR states that *“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”*³ We opine that as long as a form of speech leads to a breakdown of harmonious community relations due to its discriminatory content, it amounts to hate speech. Hate speech and freedom of expression are in diametrical opposition.

The foreign policies of a country are reflections of its internal policies. Conflict or dispute resolution are the means and methods used to bring an end to conflicts. Such means may include negotiation, mediation, diplomacy and peace building. Such resolution is an elixir for world peace and security. There are tendencies that countries could have disputes in relation to border, political, economic or social interests. There is interconnectedness between international and national peace. Most conflicts, whether by individuals or as wars fought by countries, could have remote roots in hate speech or actions considered as either hateful or repugnant. In times of war, conflicts could be concluded with a peace agreement, which is a *“formal agreement... which addresses the disputed incompatibility, either by settling all or part of it, or by clearly outlining a process for how... to regulate the incompatibility.”*⁴ However, within

1 Soken-Huberty n.d.

2 Waldron 2012, 147.

3 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

4 USDP Definitions.

some countries, it may be difficult to resolve internal conflicts if speech is considered as hate crime in one and not considered as hate crime in the other. In whatever situation or location, once speech is intended to assault or discriminate against a person or group of persons, it is hate speech.

Hate speech has been largely used by respected persons in Nigeria with the aim to either marginalize others or suppress the opinions of others. In turn, when the victim reacts, conflict ensues. Elections have been violently disrupted in Nigeria and many persons have been killed and injured in the process because hate speech was used as a method of electioneering. When hate speech persists within a country, the government must take constitutional steps towards stopping or alleviating it. Conflict resolution has been a part of Nigeria's foreign policy. That is one of the reasons why it embarks on peacekeeping across continents. However, if this international peacekeeping effort must demonstrate its values, it must first be seen that Nigeria is keeping peace and security at home. Any negative tendencies practiced at home could be taken abroad during peacekeeping. In order to make peace in or outside the country, the issue of hate speech must be addressed. A peacekeeper that leaves the shores of his/her country with a mindset full of hate speech or prejudice, will definitely harass and molest citizens of the receiving country. For example, due to complaints about various forms of abuses and sexual exploitations perpetuated by peacekeepers in various countries, in Resolution 2272 the United Nations Security Council was moved to express "deep concern about the serious and continuous allegations and under-reporting of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers and non-United Nations forces [...]"⁵

Hate speech in Nigeria is a factor of ethno-religious divisions among the people. Despite having over 370 tribes and ten religious inclinations, three tribes (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo) are mostly projected as the main tribes while Christianity and Islam are more recognised. This disparity incites social friction. Therefore, whether in times of elections, political appointments, social practices or decision making between persons, tribe and religion are mostly brought to the fore. This unhealthy competitive mindset easily translates into hate speech at the slightest provocation. The irony of this mindset is that since 1960, no Nigerian president has visibly developed the infrastructures of his people in line with ethnic or religious consideration.

Hate speech as agent provocateur and precursor to insecurity

Hate speech has been defined as the utterance "that attacks, threatens, or insults a person or group on the basis of national origin, ethnicity, color, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability".⁶ Such public speeches relate to discrimination, threats, violence, spread by written, audio, video, media, banners or slogans whether used in politics, cultural, sporting events or forms of manifestation fall into this category.

5 UN Security Council Resolution 2272.

6 Hate speech n.d.

Hate speech draws the very sharp line between the people based on ethnicity and religion. It is an agent provocateur. When the Federal Government of Nigeria moved to criminalize hate speech in Nigeria, it was largely condemned as inappropriate by many Nigerians. In 2020, a bold legislative attempt to control hate speech, particularly in relation to social media, met with stiff resistance from Nigerians who saw it as a move to curtail their freedom of expression, even though there is a clear line between tackling hate speech and restricting freedom of expression.⁷ It is obvious as enshrined in articles 22 and 39 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended); in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Cap. 10, LFN, 1990).

Those that understand the need to criminalize hate speech intentionally twisted and misinterpreted the intentions of the government for selfish reasons. To political critics, the leadership of the country was sliding into dictatorship because they did not understand that the enactment of such a law will guide both the government and the governed.

In a multi-cultural and religious country like Nigeria, inflammatory statements are so sensitive that, if not contained, could lead to ethnic and religious clashes. Record has shown that hate speech made by respected citizens has heated the polity and resulted in the loss of lives and property. The height of a litany of hate speech was leashed on Nigerians by prominent persons who heated the polity during the 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 elections for their selfish aims. The media was equally counterproductive as they quickly published such speeches and in other cases, quoted hate speech published by other news agencies in cases where they were not connected to the source.

Examples on the force of hate speech: The Nigerian elections

Hate speech campaigns around the 2011 elections are not presented in this study for the reason that 12 years ago hate speech took a very different form due to the much lower penetration of the internet (and, thus, social media). However, the 2011 and 2015 presidential elections show the same voting patterns, where ethnic cleavages re-emerged and played a major role in the outcomes of the elections: General Buhari won in North-West and North-East states while President Jonathan won in the South-East and South-South. The election results were not surprising, considering the fact of the rising religious and ethnic polarization since 2010, following the death of President Musa Yaradua and the collapse of the PDP zoning arrangement.⁸

The 2015 elections, unfortunately, provided many examples of hate speech. A study analysing the three daily editions of leading newspapers during the election period showed that the share of hate speech in the news was by far the highest, at almost 25%.⁹

7 Willy 2023.

8 Ezeibe 2020, 8.

9 Msughter 2023.

When analyzing the political discourse of the 2015 Nigerian elections, it was revealed that the main strategy of the opposition party (People Democratic Party – PDP) was based on using accusations, degrading statements and judgements.¹⁰

From the hate speech spewed by the campaign team of Jonathan Goodluck and that of Muhammadu Buhari, it could be seen that the electorate were in the middle of the crossfire.

When Muhammadu Buhari was campaigning for the elections in 2015, he was full of hate speech. On one occasion, he said: *“God willing, by 2015, something will happen. They either conduct a free and fair election or they go a very disgraceful way. If what happened in 2011 should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood.”*¹¹ As he was a retired Army General who was a former military Head of State that overthrew a civilian administration in 1983 - he was later overthrown through another military coup in 1985 - there was palpable fear that his threat could lead to religious and ethnic tensions because many people were killed after he lost the 2011 elections. It was believed that Buhari had the connections within different circles that could destabilize the country. In using the figurative expressions of animals to describe those that would be soaked in blood, he was referring to the electoral umpires known as the Independent National Electoral Commission. His statement was considered highly reprehensible with the intention to stir up anger and hate. He later won the Presidential elections in 2015.

The irony of his administration was that despite contesting presidential elections for four times as a civilian and after organizing a military coup as a soldier in 1983, President Muhammadu Buhari who hailed from northern Nigeria, could not secure the northern region nor the country for the eight years when he was in office between 2015 and 2023.

The 2015 speech by Oba Rilwan Akiolu,¹² the highly revered king known as the Oba of Lagos Nigeria, was so devastating that its ripple effects continue to envelope the politics of Lagos state several years after. During the heat of the 2015 governorship election in Lagos state, the Igbo-speaking community who reside in Lagos state visited the Oba. The Igbos of eastern Nigeria are mostly business persons with a large population in Lagos. Their votes have the capacity to impact on any election in this Yoruba-speaking western region of Nigeria. In that meeting, the Oba fiercely warned them not to vote for any other governorship candidate apart from his candidate known as Akinwunmi Ambode. Though traditional rulers are not expected to be involved in politics, Oba Akiolu aggressively instructed the Igbos on how they must vote. In his words *“On Saturday, if anyone of you goes against Ambode whom I picked, that is your end. If it doesn't happen within seven days, just know that I am a bastard and it is not my father who gave birth to me [...] By the grace of God, I am the owner of Lagos for the time being. This is an undivided chair. The palace belongs to the dead and those coming in the future. On Saturday, if anyone of you, I swear in the name of God, goes against*

10 Obiora, Aboh, Dioka 2021.

11 Binniyat 2012.

12 Oba of Lagos Does Not Speak For Us – APC.

my wish that Ambode will be the next governor of Lagos State, the person is going to die inside this water.

*I'm not ready to beg you. Nobody knew how I picked Ambode [...] I am not begging anybody, but what you people cannot do in Onitsha, Aba or anywhere, don't do it here. If you do what I want, Lagos will continue to be prosperous for you. If you go against my wish, you will perish in the water.*¹³

The election was concluded on 15 April 2015 and Ambode, the Oba's preferred candidate won and – surprisingly or not – nobody died in the water. However, the election introduced a new culture of election violence where tribalism began to take the center stage. During the subsequent 2019 elections, violence worsened due to disenfranchisement and the snatching of ballot boxes. Hate speech and ethnic profiling became rife.

In 2019, when Governor Ambode sought a second term in office, Bola Tinubu who doubled as the political godfather of Lagos politics and national leader of the All Progressives Congress (APC), refused to support Ambode's aspiration. It was expected that Oba Akiolu would give him further support but it did not happen. In order to pacify the Oba from supporting Ambode, he was reportedly gifted in other ways. It was reported that one of such ways was to offer his son the party ticket to contest elections into the House of Representatives. That was how the Oba's son Moshood Akiolu, got into the national assembly. Once these arrangements were fulfilled, the Oba turned his back at Ambode for whom he cursed the Igbos during the 2015 elections. This is an example how far persons could go just to promote their personal interests. However, the wound did not heal.

When the EndSARS protest against police brutality broke out in Nigeria in 2020, it degenerated into anarchy and looting. Oba Akiolu's palace was ravaged, ransacked and looted. He was lucky to have escaped before the mob attacked. It could not be established if the attack was connected to the previously perceived autocratic pronouncements and hate speech made by the Oba. However, it goes to show that when some persons are hurt, they may take time to unleash vengeance whenever the opportunity presents itself.

The elections in Lagos state were hellish during the presidential elections of 25 February 2023 and the governorship elections of 18 March 2023. Peter Obi, the popular presidential candidate of Labour Party (LP) was from Igbo extraction in the eastern part of the country. The tribal bigotry and hate speech catapulted by Oba Akiolu in 2015, resonated in various violent ways in the subsequent 2019 and 2023 elections. Hired thugs clearly disenfranchised voters from the Igbo tribe by asking them to steer clear of voting stations. Those that dared to appear were locked out and molested. In Aguda area of Lagos state, *Jennifer Efedu was stabbed on her face*¹⁴ by armed thugs who were hired to disrupt the voting process. Sporadic gun shots rented the air and people scampered for cover. That is the disaster that hate speech could cause.

Peter Obi ended up winning Lagos state which was the strong base of Bola Tinubu, the presidential candidate of APC. Tinubu of Yoruba extraction was the

13 Tijani 2015.

14 Violence that marred 2023 elections.

closest rival. This win against Tinubu further infuriated the political thugs of Lagos. A violent campaign of hate and tribal bigotry heightened in the subsequent governorship elections. Though paternally Yoruba, master minders of the APC party ridiculously propagated that people must not vote for Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour, the governorship candidate of the Labour party because he was maternally Igbo.

Musiliu Akinsanya aka MC Oluomo, a member of the APC Presidential Campaign Council and the leader of the Lagos State Parks Management Committee, threatened through a viral video, that those Igbos who were not prepared to vote for the governorship candidate of the APC must stay at home. He later backtracked on his statement after the fear had been instilled on the people. Due to fear of the violent threats announced by political thugs, turnout for the governorship elections was very low. The disenfranchisement gave opportunity for rigging and the subversion of the people's will. On the other hand, the elections were poorly organized because the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) did not conduct it the way it was constitutionally mandated to do.

A report by the Incident Centre for Election Atrocities (ICEA) entitled "Ethnic Profiling, Hate Speech and Endemic Violence: A Preliminary Post-Election Statement on the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria" stated that a *total of 137 persons were killed, and 57 abducted during the 2023 general elections.*¹⁵

The danger of hate speech from persons in high positions of authority means that their words carry power. Once the king made such negative statements, it was grabbed and further propagated by his subjects, especially the politicians and the errant youths. Prior to the 2020 governorship elections and in contrast to the hate speech of the Oba of Lagos, another scenario occurred at the palace of the Omo N'Oba N'Edo Uku Akpolokpolo, Oba Ewuare II, the Oba of Benin, Edo state of Nigeria. During the heated political tension between candidates of the 2020 governorship elections in the state, His Royal Majesty invited the two major contestants of APC and PDP, Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu and Mr Godwin Obaseki, respectively, to his palace. In the course of the Oba's advice to them, he said that the palace remained neutral in the state's politics but that it had regards and concerns for the candidate who had respect for the traditional institution, respect the masses and willing to create jobs for the people so that they could put food on their families' tables. He further urged the candidates to ensure that there is peace in the land throughout the election period. He demanded that the electorates must be allowed to freely cast their votes for the candidates of their choices. He admonished the people that prayer is more powerful than the gun. In his words: "*Why do you want lives to be lost by arming thugs, who will later hide the guns? [...] Enough is enough. Let the September 19 governorship election in Edo State be peaceful. [...] Don't kill yourselves over an office; don't kill yourselves over votes... I have already sacrificed my franchise over this because if I do cast my vote in favour of a particular candidate, I would have already taken side. [...]*"¹⁶

15 137 killed, 57 abducted during 2023 elections – Report.

16 Emenyonu 2020.

Thereafter, the elections were conducted peacefully and the electorates voted without hindrances. To a large extent, that same peace was replicated in the subsequent elections which took place in Edo state.

The divided Nigeria

The country is fractured along countless fault lines and has become a breeding ground for hate speech. Some attribute the root of the problems to divisions between the three main tribes (Hausas in the North, Ibos in the East and Yorubas in the West), while others attribute them to differences between religious groups (Christians and Muslims in particular).¹⁷ Furthermore, insecurity caused also by banditry in much of the North, and separatist agitations in much of the South, can be fertile grounds for hate speech by the country's religious, tribal or political leaders; that have resulted in vicious insecurity. Moreover, at the heart of these existential challenges is the relentless desire of some to wreak as much havoc as possible on the country.¹⁸ When hate speech is historicized in Nigeria, it shows the role that it has played in catapulting religious, cultural, political and economic differences into a level where uncertainties and violence were brought to bear.

An example of hate speech based on the North-South divide, is the statement of the National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, Dr. Junaidu Mohammed. He was arrested by the State Security Service after he was reported as stating that [...] there would be bloodletting if President Goodluck Jonathan "contested the 2015 presidential elections and if a candidate of northern extraction was not elected as Nigeria's next president."¹⁹ When his candidate lost the election, hate speech was transformed into action. Post-election violence in 2011 became one of the worst in the history of Nigeria as it recorded more than "800 people dead."²⁰ It is ironical that, when Muhammadu Buhari finally won the elections against Jonathan Goodluck in 2015, the same Junaidu criticized Buhari for exploiting religion to win the elections.

Many of the conflicts in Nigeria are results of accumulated hate speech intended to incite the people against themselves. Over time, many citizens have developed a mindset of divisionism either through tribe or religion. This mindset reduces trust, increases suspicion and weakens patriotism. It also forces the people to support leaders with bad records as long as they belong to the same tribe or region. On the whole, the emotion is translated into elections and consequently, bad governance.

Hate speech is when they refer to the Igbos as drug traffickers because one of them was arrested with drugs. It is when they refer to the Urhobo-speaking tribe as 'Urhobo wayo' which means that the Urhobos are tricksters. Hate speech denigrates others. It instigates and incites people to destabilize a village, city, state and country. Freedom of speech is different from hate speech only if it does not incite. In my opinion, freedom of expression ends where hate speech begins.

17 Yola 2017.

18 Willy 2023.

19 SaharaTV Interview: I Did Not Call For Bloodshed, Says Junaid Mohammed.

20 Nigeria: Post-Election Violence Killed 800.

Though the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria took a step towards enacting a new law to check hate speech, the victims of hate speech continue to increase. The several hateful speeches by Nnamdi Kanu, who usually referred to Nigeria as a zoo, – and, who led a failed secession attempt in the name of establishing a country to be called Biafra, resulted in the loss of incalculable human lives, arson, and national insecurity between 2017 and 2023. His foot soldiers metamorphosed into the so-called Eastern Security Network and unknown gun men. They created so much violent unrest in the eastern region. Police stations, private buildings and electoral offices were set ablaze. Many persons were abducted and slaughtered – including security personnel. They imposed sit-at-home orders against their people on Mondays, thereby depriving them of their freedom of movement and rights to economic activities.

In February 2021, Facebook decided to block the account of Nnamdi Kanu because according to the spokesperson for Facebook, they *“removed Nnamdi Kanu’s page for repeatedly posting content that break those Community Standards, including content that violated our rules on coordinating harm and hate speech.”*²¹

The Nigerian constitution guarantees the right of every Nigerian to freedom of speech and expression. Section 39 (1) of the 1999 Nigerian constitution clearly states that *“Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression”*. However, there are laws in Nigeria to guard against hate speech, false publication and defamation of character. For example, Sections 373, 375 and 376 of Nigeria’s Criminal Code Act as well as the Defamatory and Offensive Publications Act, criminalize defamation. Again, Section 418 of the Penal Code which states that *“Whoever circulates, publishes or reproduces any statement, rumor or report which he knows or has reason to believe to be false with intent to cause or which is likely to cause fear or alarm to the public whereby any person may be induced to commit an offence against the public peace, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years or with fine or with both.”*

In addition, both Sections 59(1) and (2) of the Criminal Code Act and Section 418 of the penal Code are applied as a check against false publications. International law also prohibits hate speech under Article 20 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It requires states to prohibit hate speech as stated thus: *“Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.”*²² However, the political will to enforce the law is certainly lacking, as there are no reports of anyone being found guilty of a hate crime by the courts.²³

Sadly, another example of hate speech based on religious divisions is the case of kidnappings. In the heat of kidnapping in Nigeria, certain persons acted as negotiators between the kidnappers and the families of the kidnapped. The negotiations were focused on how to pay ransoms to the kidnapper. The ransoms were usually taken to the kidnappers in the forests. On one occasion, it was reported that the negotiator told the Muslim extremists that it was the Christians that usually

21 Nigerian separatist Nnamdi Kanu’s Facebook account removed for hate speech.

22 General Comment No. 11

23 Hate Speech and the Challenges of Post-Election Peacebuilding in Nigeria.

killed their colleagues. The idea was to pitch them against Christians. Though Muslims were also attacked, the consequence of that statement led to more attacks against Christians and the destruction of Churches. The result was that the death toll between *“1st January to 18th July 2021 has risen to no fewer than 3,462 and this is just sixty-eight deaths less than the total deaths of Nigerian Christians in 2020.”*²⁴ On the other hand, when analyzing ethno-religious crises in Nigeria, the Council on Foreign Relations cites the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in which it stated that *13,241 Nigerians were killed extrajudicially in the decade between 2011 and 2021.*²⁵

The consequences of hate speech on Nigeria’s international engagement in peace efforts

Within these periods of the violent tension and insecurity in Nigeria, the government continued to send troops abroad for peacekeeping operations. In 2021, 200 Nigerian soldiers were serving in the Economic Community for West Africa States (ECOWAS), mission in The Gambia. Sixty-two soldiers and officers were also sent to Mali on a peacekeeping mission on December 3, 2021, while 173 others were deployed for peacekeeping mission to Guinea Bissau on April 21, 2022. Also, on April 30, 2022, the Nigerian Army sent a contingent of 205 troops to The Gambia on a peacekeeping mission.²⁶

Peacekeeping is a very vital function of the United Nations. Since participating countries have different cultures and orientations, they must only send troops that have been professionally trained and devoid of spoken emotions that could defeat the purpose of the mission. It is dangerous to send troops who have imbibed the attitude of hate speech and unnecessary violence. Such personnel could be harmful to the citizens of the receiving country mostly in terms of physical harassment and sexual exploitation.

Hate speech has caused many conflicts in Nigeria. It is a precursor to conflicts. Unlike peacekeeping, it is so partial that it does not warrant the consent of the victim. It was expected that with the various security challenges and conflicts, Nigeria ought to recall her military troops from other countries to secure the home front instead of sending more to keep peace in other countries. While these troops were being sent abroad, it was reported that *“at least 2,085 persons were killed in Nigeria between October to December 2021 in violent incidents across the country, while a total of 10,366 died in 2021. Between January and March 2022, at least 2,968 people were killed while another 1,484 were abducted. 323 were killed by non-state actors. At least 323 security operatives were killed between January and May 15, 2022.”*²⁷ The violence in Nigeria could be prevented and brought to an end, through the exercise of strong political will by the president of Nigeria because he has the power to efficiently deploy the necessary mechanisms of state power at the quickest possible time.

24 Aineah 2021.

25 Gruesome “Blasphemy” Killing Brings Nigeria’s Long-Running Ethno-Religious Divide Into Sharp Focus.

26 Buhari sends 640 soldiers on peacekeeping duties amid insecurity.

27 Ibid.

Conclusions

Hate speech is an enemy to nation building and societal peace. It led to the genocide in Rwanda and the manhunt against the Jews in the Nazi regime. It has caused several ethno-religious conflicts and deaths in Nigeria due to the laxity of government. The continuing participation by traditional and religious rulers in politics is a huge threat to democracy because it encroaches on the mindset and rights of their followers.

In a multicultural society in Nigeria with 371 spoken languages, 374 ethnic groups and different religions, law and order could easily be broken if the law against hate speech is not strictly applied in line with the rule of law. If internal conflicts must be resolved and troops sent to maintain peace in other countries, there must be a domestic purge of hate speech and other root causes of conflicts so that peace could also be enjoyed in the country.

The situation in Nigeria is very worrying. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) recently expressed concern about the rise in hate speech across the country, fuelled mainly by politicians seeking political patronage, but the use and misuse of social media to spread religious and ethnic and hate-laced messages is also worrisome.²⁸

However, solving this issue is not easy at all. On 18 June 2023, the International Day of Action against Hate Speech, the UN Secretary-General underlined that misguided and ambiguous responses to hate speech, including blanket bans and shutting down the internet, are not the solution, as they can also violate human rights by restricting freedom of expression. They silence even those who are best placed to challenge hate narratives.²⁹ Theoretically, there are two categories of hate speech interventions: absolutism (which primarily argues against limitations of the right to freedom of expression, like in the United States) and pragmatism (which operates with laws and other measures).³⁰ Nigeria is trying to (because it has to) have it both ways, as it already has the legislation in place, but society is pushing for freedom of expression. A solution could be reached if the media desist from quoting and broadcasting hate speech made by their perpetrators. When such broadcasts get to the social media, they are further blown out of proportion and given undue publicity, which, in turn, encourages more of such speeches and incitements. In 2022, Nigeria came up with a constructive solution and directly asked Facebook for help, requesting that the platform itself restrict the publication of hate speech on its site.³¹

In Nigeria, traditional and religious leaders must also be banned from participating in politics. Their activities must be respectively restricted as custodians of tradition and religion. On the other hand, existing laws must be strictly applied whenever the offence of hate speech is detected. It is perhaps no coincidence that on 18 February 2018, a bill was proposed to introduce the death penalty for hate crime

28 Nathaniel 2023.

29 The UN Secretary-General 2023.

30 Ilori 2023.

31 Eboh 2022.

offences. Under the proposal sponsored by Senator Aliyu Sabi Abdullahi, hate speech is any speech that has the intent of denigrating, repressing, harassing, and wishing the death of a person or group of persons on the basis of tribal affiliation, sex, religion or ethnic group.³² However, death penalty is too harsh as punishment for perpetrators of hate speech, especially in a country where murderous terrorists have been granted amnesty and reintegrated into the society.

Finally, there is a need for Nigeria to withdraw its troops from peacekeeping missions for a period of time. This will offer more human capacity to fight the insecurity and insurgencies bedeviling the country and ensure security in the country. Charity begins at home.

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