



## Media, Hate Speech and Peace Building in Nigeria

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Received 16 March 2024; accepted 27 April 2024

Published online 26 June 2024

### Abstract

The importance of mass media in the development process of any country cannot be over-emphasized. Aside their traditional roles which are to inform, educate and entertain, the media, which include print, broadcast and new media, also serve as catalysts for development through creation of veritable avenues for aggregation and dissemination of opinions, devoid of undue censorship. The media also facilitate peace building, particularly in plural societies and serve as veritable instruments for national integration. Using a blend of secondary and primary data, this paper, which covers the Fourth Republic (1999 till date), assessed the nexus among the media, hate speech and peace building in Nigeria, interrogating the roles of the media vis-a-vis the freedom of expression as guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) and how effectively it has performed its gate-keeping roles to guard against hate speeches capable of thwarting peace building, particularly among the various ethnic, religious and social groups in Nigeria. The paper inferred that although hate speech is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria, concerted efforts must be made to sensitize citizens on the need to end its menace to prevent incitement and plunging the country into needless crises capable of halting peace building and threatening its continued corporate existence.

**Key words:** Media; Hate-speech; Peace-building; Development; National-interest

Sadeeq, W. (2024). Media, Hate Speech and Peace Building in Nigeria. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 20(2), 79-90. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/13380>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/13380>

### INTRODUCTION

There is no doubting the fact that media are very crucial to national development. As part of their responsibilities, they influence public opinion, promote democracy and good governance, influence the behaviours of the citizenry and promote people-oriented policies and programmes of any government. The media are, therefore, the vanguard for political, economic and social development. Beside their traditional roles of informing, educating and entertaining, the media, which include the print, broadcast and the new media, are also expected to serve as catalysts for development, through the creation of veritable avenues for aggregation and dissemination of opinion in an atmosphere that promotes free speech and freedom of the press. Part of their roles also are agenda setting, gate keeping and putting governments on their toes by making them accountable to the people, who are the ultimate sovereign in any polity. The media are equally expected to facilitate peace building, particularly in a plural and diverse society and serve as a veritable instrument for national integration.

Even though the media have strived to deliver on their traditional mandate in Nigeria, one of the challenges facing them is the issue of hate speech which is taking its toll on its peace building efforts.

One of the salient issues currently on the front burner of national discourse in Nigeria today is hate speech. Indeed, the issue has gained special impetus owing to the move by the National Assembly, particularly the Senate, to criminalise hate speech. The upper legislative chamber, in its attempt to prove to Nigerians that hate speech is a serious offence, even spelt out death penalty as punishment for offenders, especially if it causes any loss of life. Expectedly, the introduction of the bill sparked outrage from stakeholders, both within and outside the shores of Nigeria, all of whom saw it as not only a joke taken too far but an unwarranted attempt to trample on the fundamental human rights of the citizenry, particularly the

right to freedom of expression and, by extension, stifle the time-tested freedom of the press. Eke (2019) contends that the bill remains one of the most controversial bills to be deliberated upon by the legislative arm of government in Nigeria. This development has, no doubt, posed serious challenge for the Nigerian media in the performance of their traditional roles of informing, educating and entertaining the citizens as well as promoting peace building and free speech.

This paper, covering the Fourth Republic (1999 till date), seeks to assess the nexus among the media, hate speech and peace building in Nigeria. It also seeks to interrogate the roles of the mass media vis-a-vis the freedom of expression, as guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) and how effectively they have been performing their gate keeping roles to guide and guard against hate speeches which are capable of thwarting peace building, particularly among the various ethnic, religious and social groups in the country.

## CONCEPTUALISING THE MEDIA

Media is the collective communication outlets or tools used to store and deliver information or data. It is either associated with communication media or the specialised mass media communication businesses such as print media and the press, photography, advertising, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television), publishing and point of sale. Media is the sword arm of democracy (Mahatmaji, 2002). Also, media can be viewed as the paths, ways or means through which messages are disseminated. They are channels through which information are passed across, with provision for feedback between the encoder and decoder of the message (Sadeeq, 2006). To Defleur and Dennis (1981), media are devices for moving messages across distance or time to accomplish mass communication.

The media is generally regarded as the fourth estate of the realm, with the three estates being the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. They have the responsibility to serve as watchdog to the three arms of government, all in an attempt to ensure a better polity. According to Chrunga and Mbwirire (2020), the media are also saddled with the responsibility of protecting public interest against malpractice, creating public awareness, serving as the intermediary between the government and the people and a veritable tool through which information are channelled between the two divides. In essence, they have an all-embracing role of acting against possible injustice, oppression and misdeeds in the society.

Just as the media, whether traditional or new media, has its statutory roles as enunciated above, so also the media practitioners. Since journalism entails a high degree of public trust, it is, therefore, morally incumbent

on the practitioners to maintain and earn the trust. This is why it is expressly stated in the code of ethics for Nigerian journalists, without any ambiguity, what is expected of media practitioners in the discharge of their responsibilities. For instance, every journalist and every news medium is expected to observe the highest professional and ethical standards. In the exercise of these duties, a journalist should always have a healthy regard for the public interest. Also, as truth is the cornerstone of journalism, every journalist is expected to strive diligently to ascertain the truth of every event before disseminating report on such event to the public. In specific terms, the Code of Ethics requires every media practitioner to observe (i) editorial independence; (ii) accuracy and fairness; (iii) Privacy (respect for privacy of individuals and their families, unless it affects public interest); (iv) Privilege/non-disclosure (principle of confidentiality and refusal to disclose source of information obtained in confidence); (v) Decency (refraining from using offensive, abusive or vulgar language); (vi) Discrimination (refraining from making pejorative reference to a person's ethnic group, religion, sex or any physical or mental illness or handicap); (vii) Reward and gratification (not soliciting nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information); (viii) Violence (not presenting or reporting acts of violence, armed robberies, terrorist activities or vulgar display of wealth in a manner that glorifies such acts in the eyes of the public); (ix) Children and minors (not identifying, either by name or picture, or interviewing children under the age of 16 who are involved in cases concerning sexual offences, crimes and rituals or witchcraft, either as victims, witnesses or defendants); (x) Access to information (employing open and honest means in the gathering of information); (xi) Public interest (enhancing national unity and public good); (xii) Social responsibility (promoting universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, peace and international understanding); (xiii) Plagiarism (not copying, wholesale or in part, other people's work without attribution and/or consent); (xiv) Copyright ((abiding by all rules of copyright established by national and international laws and conventions); and (xv) Press freedom and responsibility (striving at all times to enhance press freedom and responsibility) (NUJ, 2019). Expanding further, Rodney (2011) opines that journalists need not be moral philosophers but that they must be aware of competing values as they make value judgments on what facts to select and emphasis in news story, what news story to publish or broadcast and what to leave out or what angle to take and what questions to ask, adding that they must be extra-ordinarily sensitive to questions of fairness, balance and competence, to interests competing with their conscience in the context of personal and common standards, to organisation and societal norms, and try to be moral in distinguishing between right

and wrong. Findings, however, show that journalists in Nigeria are far from adhering strictly to the code of ethics, as demanded by their profession. As observed by Rodney (2011), journalists in Nigeria have severally failed to uphold the truth and maintain balance. Corroborating this assertion, Abbas (2000) notes that journalists have been accused severally of partisan bias, which is a serious crime against the truth. The issue of gratification is another sour point in journalism practice in Nigeria and this has been largely attributed to payment of wages that are below poverty line by most media organisations as well as hostile working environment.

## EXAMINING HATE SPEECH

Like it sounds, hate speech connotes 'hatred' in all its ramifications. As succinctly put by Adedokun (2020), it may be hatred expressed towards a nation, ethnic groups, marginal groups or personalities, especially among the politicians. According to European Court of Human Rights, 2017, freedom of expression is one of the important basics and foundations of any society, especially in a democratic society, as it is a tool by which progress and development can be achieved. It is applicable not only to information or ideas that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb the state or any section of the population. Osinbajo (2017) describes hate speech as a species of terrorism, adding that it is the unlawful use of violence or intimidation against individuals or groups, especially for political aims. Also, the law on hate speech terrorism 2011 in Nigeria views hate speech as an act deliberately done with malice and which may seriously harm or damage a country or a population. (Quoted from Ndah-Isaiah in Leadership.ng, 2017). Hate speech has been described in various ways. In the document of European Court of Human Rights, several examples were given as to what could constitute hate speech, some of which include:

(i) When newspaper articles, cartoons (drawings) provoke a certain public reaction, capable of stirring up violence and demonstrating a plausible impact on public order in the region, nation or country.

(ii) Inciting to hatred and hostility on the basis of a distinction between social classes, races and religions, also when leaflets that incite people to violence are circulated.

(iii) Openly inciting the population to hatred and hostility on the basis of a distinction founded on membership of a religion or denomination. (Extremist ideas)

(iv) Publications bothering on dissemination of propaganda against the indivisibility of a state promoting enmity and hatred among the people may amount to hate speech. (Cited in Adedokun, 2020). To Enahoro (2017) hate speeches are polluted statement, especially by

Nigerians, attacking each other on the basis of ethnicity or religion while Nadim and Fledmoe (2016) view it as any persecuting, degrading or discriminating speech on ground of the recipient's minority group identity. According to them, comments that will be regarded as hate speech must be conveyed publicly or in the presence of others and be directed at a certain group or on individuals' assumed group identity. This, in essence, means that comments regarded as hate speeches must be directed at personally attacking race, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability or gender (Nockleby, 2000).

However, around the world, hate speech appears to be on the rise on daily basis due to the general feelings of exclusion, marginalisation, deprivation and interests not being properly taken care of. Incidentally, the media have served as the major purveyors of hate speech, with its attendant debilitating effects on peaceful co-existence among people of diverse backgrounds. Although there appears to be no exact legal definition of hate speech, it has been generally defined as any form of expression through which speakers intend to vilify, humiliate or incite hatred against a group or a class of persons on the basis of race, religion, skin colour, sexual identity, gender identity, ethnicity, disability or national origin. (Ward, 1998) According to the United Nations, hate speech is "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factors. This is often rooted in, and generates intolerance and hatred and, in certain contexts, can be demeaning and divisive." (.....).

The United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, in his foreword to the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, 2019, says that hate is moving into the mainstream – in liberal democracies and authoritarian systems alike, and with each broken norm, the pillars of common humanity are weakened. He states further that "around the world, we are seeing a disturbing groundswell of xenophobia, racism and intolerance – including rising anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and persecution of Christians. Social media and other forms of communication are being exploited as platforms for bigotry.

Neo-Nazi and white supremacy movements are on the march. Public discourse is being weaponized for political gains, with incendiary rhetoric that stigmatizes and dehumanizes minorities, migrants, refugees, women and any so-called "other".

However, Guterres says that rather than prohibiting hate speech, international law prohibits the incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, stressing that incitement is a very dangerous form of speech as it explicitly and deliberately aims at triggering

discrimination, hostility and violence, which may also lead to or include terrorism or atrocity crimes. When hate speech is left unaddressed or unattended to, it can result in violence or hate crimes against the individuals or groups that consider themselves marginalized, excluded or deprived. Although some statements may not trigger violence immediately, they may plant the fruits of intolerance and anger, thus leading to acts of hate and bitterness.

The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) believes that hate speech requires a coordinated response from religious leaders, policy makers, journalists and the general public – both to address the main drivers of hate speech and to provide a coordinated response which upholds the fundamental rights and inclusion of all communities and individuals (kaiciid.org).

At this juncture, there is the need to juxtapose the concept of hate speech with freedom of expression which is protected under international law, with clear rights outlined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). According to the Article, 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 (United Nations). Also, ICCPR attempts to ensure the protection of civil and political rights. This was adopted by the United Nations' General Assembly on December 19, 1966 and it came into force on March 23, 1976. It recognizes the inherent dignity of each individual and undertakes to promote conditions within states to allow the enjoyment of civil and political rights. Countries that have ratified the Covenant are obligated "to protect and preserve basic human rights... (and) "compel(ed) to take administrative, judicial and legislative measures in order to protect the rights enshrined in the treaty and to provide an effective remedy." It should be added that there are currently 74 signatories and 168 parties to the ICCPR.

There are several laws which are aimed at preventing individuals and groups from engaging in hate speeches. One of such laws is the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which states that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement or discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law. (Wikipedia.org). In Nigeria, one of the fundamental human rights guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution (as amended) is the right to freedom of expression. Section 39(1) of the constitution states that every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information, without interference. Suffice to say, therefore, that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right guaranteed by law, even though it must not, in any way, be exploited to vilify, humiliate or

incite hatred against any individual or class of individuals for whatever reason.

Although there appears to be no specific provision for press freedom in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the media have found a safe haven in Section 39(1) which gives express backing to right to freedom of expression to discharge their responsibilities of informing, educating and entertaining the public. As purveyors of information, part of the challenges which the media have had to grapple with is hate speech. This has become expedient in view of the fact that if care is not taken, the media can be manipulated and used as pawns in the chessboard of harbingers of hate speech to achieve premeditated ends. White (.....) opines that oftentimes, ignorance and lack of appreciation of different cultures, traditions and beliefs lead to stereotypes that reinforce racist attitudes and strengthen the appeal of political extremists. This then means that for the media not to fall prey to those termed political extremists by White, the media must appreciate different cultures, traditions and beliefs of the people in their respective areas of operations so as not to set one class of people against the other, either by omission or commission, all in the name of informing, educating and entertaining them. No wonder he describes hate speech laws as legitimate antidote to racism, insofar as they protect vulnerable groups from objective harm such as incitement to hostility, discrimination or violence. Also Guy Berger, Director of Policies and Strategies for Communication and Information, UNESCO, opines that freedom of expression is instrumental to peace in any society. Speaking at a breakout session of the World Press Freedom Day Global Conference entitled 'Freedom of Expression during Conflicts: Curbing of War-related Disinformation Vs Access to Information on Internet Platforms,' he said that if people are enabled to have pluralistic and reliable information, the presence of peace would be unavoidable adding that public opinion and a free media have the ability to end conflicts, citing the example of the Vietnam war (Daily Trust, Lagos, May 5, 2022).

Of particular interest here is the incursion of social media into the traditional media space. Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Social media is also a term used to refer to new forms of media or digital platforms that involve interactive participation. (Manning, 2014). Examples of social media tools are electronic blogs, audio or video tools, Internet chat rooms, cellular and computer texting, and social networking sites (Bryer & Zavattaro, 2011). The social media sites include: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinedIn, YouTube, TikTok and blogs, among others, all of which can be used as social network, media network, discussion network and review network. Expatriating further,

Hudson (2020) describes social media as referring to websites and applications designed to allow people share content quickly, efficiently and in real-time. According to him, while many people access social media through smartphone apps, the communication tool started with computers, stressing that it has since transformed the way we live and the way we do business. The implication is that the new media has turned virtually everybody into journalists, as the access to various devices has made it easy for anyone to record any event and post it on social media unhindered and unchecked. This is what is now referred to as citizen journalism. But, it is not without its negative effects, which are both physical and mental, as citizens lacking professional training in journalism can use it for cyber bullying and spreading false information and hate speech, thus negating every letter in the ethics of the profession. Perhaps it should be stated here that aside media practitioners, others, such as political actors, youths, political parties, ethnic groupings, elites, socio-political organisations are also implicated as propagators of hate speech which is widely believed to be highly entrenched and predominant.

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## IDEALISING PEACE BUILDING

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Peace building encompasses measures for preventing violent conflicts and promoting lasting and sustainable peace in the context of emerging, current or post-conflict situations. It is one of the key terms in the area of conflict resolution. Other similar terms include: conflict management/mitigation, peacemaking, conflict transformation as well as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. According to Waldman (2009), peace building seeks to prevent, reduce, transform and help people recover from violence and armed conflict as well as empowering them to foster positive relationships at all levels of the society. While corroborating Waldman, Moulton (2021) also views peace building as a process intended to resolve current conflicts and prevent future conflicts by addressing the causes of the problem and building a comprehensive strategy to encourage lasting peace. He states further that successful peace building not only stops or prevents violent conflict, but it also changes the way disagreements are handled in a society or between and among nations. It focuses on the desire to maintain peace while acknowledging problems and disagreements as a normal part of human interactions. Rather than rushing to violence, Moulton contends that peace building teaches the different parties how to address their problems rationally, how to find solutions cooperatively and how to identify new problems early enough to address them before further problems arise.

The term 'peace building' first entered the conflict resolution lexicon with the publication of the United Nation's *Agenda for Peace* in 1992, which described

post-conflict peace building as the 'comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance some sense of confidence and well-being among people. It particularly described post-conflict peace building as an "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). The concept is said to have since been adopted by a number of scholars to suggest a framework for peace that addresses not only the latent forms of physical violence, but also aspects of a society that are structurally violent and could lead to a re-emergence of fighting.

Waldman (2009) sees peace building as a reaction to some of the more simplistic earlier approaches to building peace, recognising the deep-rooted nature of conflict and its link to development. Although it was initially seen as being restricted to post-conflict situations, peace building has since widened to apply to different phases of the conflict cycle, including conflict prevention. It should, however, be stated that its most frequent application is to post-conflict situations.

One particular point that should be emphasised here is that an international post-conflict peace building community, comprising primarily of the United Nations and its agencies, donor governments, global financial institutions, international and local NGOs, the military, peace and conflict research institutions and the private sector, has emerged in recent years. This is coupled with development of new partnerships, with their activities moving beyond their hitherto traditional roles.

Three principles have been identified by experts as yardsticks for explaining the concept of peace building. One, that peace building should take a long-term view in order to build an enduring peace (a peace which should be viewed as a process, not an end-point). Two, that it should take a broad and comprehensive view of the people and contexts which produce conflict (and not just focus on elites and top-level initiatives). Three, that it must focus on preventing minor conflicts from escalating into open warfare (Walman, 2009).

Furthermore, there appears to be a consensus of opinions among scholars that there is no single process or strategy applicable to peace building, as no two situations are ever the same. However, seven key components of strategic peace building have been identified by the United States Institute of Peace for possible incorporation into any peace building plan. They are: (i) recognizing the burdens of long-term violence; (ii) eliciting plans from locals (iii) conflict transformation (iv) insider-outsider links (v) dealing with spoilers (vi) identifying obstacles to strategic peace building, and (vii) eliciting and evaluating.

In Nigeria, lots of efforts have been made by government to ensure peace building that will eliminate conflicts, reduce tension and engender growth and

development in the country. Various forms of assistance have also been rendered by various stakeholders, international organisations and other interested partners towards enthroning a society free of crises. “To achieve a lasting peace,” says David Young, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S Embassy in Nigeria, “we must all work together. Together, we must condemn the violence that has claimed innocent lives in Nigeria. We must break the cycle of impunity that fuels grievances on all sides, and so we must all call for effective law enforcement to arrest and prosecute criminal actors. We must work together towards addressing the long term drivers of conflict and tension across Nigeria. And finally, we must all speak out for peace. For all of us, our words matter. Our actions matter. And we can all make a difference.” With these words, Young seems to have put in proper perspective what can be seen as the panacea to achieving the needed peace in Nigeria, a country that has been ravaged by series of conflicts and strife that have been threatening its oneness, unity and continued corporate existence.

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## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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This paper is anchored on Theory of the Public Sphere as espoused by Jurgen Habermas. In his seminal work, *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere*, Habermas, a German Sociologist and critical theorist, viewed public sphere as various avenues where citizens can freely express, participate, communicate and share their understanding, ideas and information involving political, social issues and other diverse things that affect their social coexistence, including peace and conflicts. According to Chikezie, Uzuegbunam and Omenugha (2018), the platforms comprise, but are not limited to, clubs, coffee joints and saloon joints, assemblies and hangouts. They also listed places like motor parks, viewing centres, tea joints and market places as possible public spheres, especially in Nigeria. Kperogi (2011, p.60), referred to such platforms as “open, inclusive, dialogic arena of rational-critical discourse untrammelled by either the state or the private sector and that acts as a check on state power.” To Frazer (2017), the public sphere signifies a discursive arena in modern societies where private persons discuss matters of common concern. Ideally, it is the site of free, unrestricted, rational communication. As a vehicle for unmasking domination, publicity constitutes a medium for scrutinizing the actions of state officials and the operation of private powers, holding the first accountable and encouraging them to rein in the second. While the ideal of the public sphere bears little resemblance with actually existing arenas of manipulated pseudo-publicity, it affords a normative yardstick for criticizing the latter. In general, the concept supplies a rubric for evaluating the legitimacy and efficacy of what passes for “public opinion” in modern societies (Frazer, 2017).

The advancement in information and communication technology has, however, transformed the character of Habermas’ public sphere theory from a physical location to a more sophisticated, cyber-based but complicated communication space where members of social organizations gather, though not necessarily physically, to exchange ideas and opinions on public affairs and engage in a critical and analytical manner (Ubayasiri, 2007; Allan, 2010; Abubakar, 2012). This is owing to the advent of technology which has an alternative avenue for expansion of public sphere for the exchange of ideas and opinions on matters of public interest. Adut (2012) emphasizes the spatial dimension of the public sphere, examines the semiotics of general visibility along with the logic of publicity and shows how these impinge fatefully on political behaviour. This approach, according to him, enables a superior understanding of public spaces and events, including the communications privileged by the dominant approach. It also captures the dialectical relationship between politics and public spaces, stressing, however, that public sphere can both enhance and derail liberal democracy.

The power of the mass media has endangered the critical nature of the public sphere, as it is the media that transforms the society into a passive public. This has further been compounded by the activities and effects of the new media with limited degree of control in terms of news dissemination, observance of journalism ethics and exhibition of professionalism. In making case for the use of the social media as a tool for engendering peace-building in Nigeria, two principles of the public sphere should be critically considered, as suggested by Chikezie, Uzuegbunam and Omenugha (2018). One, that the media is independent of government and corporate control or interference and that is a platform that is free and devoid of restrictions that hinder freedom of expression. Two, that the discourse in the public sphere could be amiable, critical and rational. Thus, participants avoid sentimental and coloured responses to issues as may be seen in the mainstream media because of its many gatekeepers and ownership policies. This gives them the opportunity to question some of their personal assumptions that may not be in conformity with rational discourse. The absence of dogmatism is, therefore, ensured while the sphere is, to some extent, inclusive and equal.

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## MEDIA, HATE SPEECH AND PEACE BUILDING IN NIGERIA: THE NEXUS

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There is no doubting the fact that a major nexus exists between the media and hate speech as well as peace building in Nigeria. Suffice to say that in a where the media surrender themselves to serving as purveyors of hate speech, there will be absence of peace, while peace building efforts may take longer time to normalise the

situation. While the media are saddled with the traditional roles of informing, educating and entertaining the public, and serving as catalysts for development, they will equally be assessed with regards to how much they are able to manage hate speeches with a view to protecting national interest and fostering peace building in Nigeria. As purveyors of information, the media is expected to rise above primordial sentiments and refuse to surrender themselves or their platforms for any act that could be tantamount to fanning the embers of discord in the interest of building a society devoid of hate speech and its attendant implication of throwing the country into a Hobbesian society where might is right and lawlessness reigns supreme.

There are, however, mounting concerns over how proactive the media in Nigeria have been in preventing hate speech from gaining traction and thus thwarting whatever peace building process that may be required for the continued corporate existence of the country. But even then, the need for addressing hate speech should be emphasised in view of its debilitating effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the media and their impacts on the victims and the society at large. This has become more expedient in view of the political matrix of Nigeria as a pluralistic and complex society.

It should also be stated that the advent of social media has further compounded the challenges of hate speech in the country. Although social media or new media are generally believed to be propellers of socio-economic and political transformations in a modern society, they seem to have been ready instruments in the hands of agents of destabilisation and harbinger of hate speech in view of their uncontrolled usage. Also, owing to the liberty in the use of social media occasioned by its easy access, Nigerians have, in recent times, been using it as an instrument of expressing their views on national issues. Recent happenings have, however, revealed that the use of vile and hateful comments by many Nigerians have dominated the social media space, particularly Facebook and Twitter. This development is an indication of the potentials of social media to pose serious threats to the country's peaceful coexistence through proliferation of hate comments.

Auwal (2018) is of the view that while the development of social media has further enhanced citizens' access to information and the rights to reply, this liberty has, however, not been exercised with its corresponding responsibility. According to him, even though social media, like other forms of media, guarantee the access of users to various points of views, discussions among Nigerians on the social media space are overwhelmed with tendencies that can promote extreme negative feelings and bring about hatred or incitement to violence against groups of individuals because of their ethnic, religious and regional orientations. Auwal, from

his analysis, finds that comments are usually abusive of the ethnic, regional and religious affiliations of the diverse population of Nigeria. This is corroborated by Ojo and Adebayo (2013) who opine that whenever national economic, political and social issues are discussed, as they relate to, and affect the different groups in Nigeria, the way and manner opinions are expressed via the social media usually wear the toga of incitement, with the attendant implication of causing arson, breakdown of law and order and throwing the country into unwarranted crisis. According to Ogwuonu (2017), the incessant and unprovoked hate utterances ranting the electronic and print media in Nigeria is a threat to national unity. While expressing concern over the way and manner some ethnic or tribal leaders in the country indulge in making hate speeches to achieve their selfish ambitions to the detriment of the people they claim to be protecting, he points out that a situation where the three major ethnic groups see the Nigerian state as a ball to kick at any time without any substantial aim is worrisome and a threat to the country's peace and stability.

Instances abound where hate speeches have been made without an iota of consideration for the implication on the continued corporate existence of the country. Indeed, Auwal (2018) categorises hate speeches into six: (i) offensive comments (ii) hate comments (iii) inciting comments, comprising of calls for secession and incitement to violence against individuals, ethnic and regional groups in the country (iv) abusive comments (v) provocative comments, and (vi) derogatory comments.

It is also imperative to state that hate speech can step-up the tempo of irredentist claims in a pluralistic society like Nigeria. If the situation continues without proper attention by government and relevant stakeholders to find lasting remedy to curb these ills among Nigerians, efforts to achieve peace and other developmental objectives may not see the light of the day. Concerned by this apparent dangerous trend, the Federal Government has drawn a line on hate speech in Nigeria, equating it to terrorism. Speaking at the National Economic Council Security Retreat at the Presidential Villa in Abuja on August 17, 2010, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, who was then the acting president, described the intimidation of a population by words or speech as an act of terrorism, stressing that it would no longer be tolerated by the Muhammadu Buhari-led administration and that it would be taken seriously. "As I have said, we have drawn a line against hate speech; it will not be tolerated; it will be taken as an act of terrorism and all of the consequences will follow," he was quoted as saying. Continuing, Osinbajo called on Nigerian business, political and religious leaders to condemn, in the strongest possible terms, hate speeches that promote violence against an individual or a group, especially when such speech come from people of your own faith, tribe or group. According to him, when leaders in communities

that speak in such a manner to create dissension or intimidate the population are quiet, they do a great disservice to the country's unity, adding that their silence in such a situation can only be seen as an endorsement. "This is why I urge all political leaders, religious leaders, business leaders and all of those who truly want a united country, a country where there will be peace and security to ensure that we do not tolerate, by our silence, the hate speech that we hear every day in our communities," he added (*Premium Times*, August 17, 2017). Although the acting president shied away from mentioning any name or group in his speech, some of those who had, at one time or the other, been accused of indulging in hate speech included Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the secessionist pro-Biafra group, Independent Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), some northern youths who, in various audio speeches, have spread hate against other ethnic groups and the militants in the Niger-Delta region, with Mujahideen Asari Dokubo, Government Ekpemupolo (popularly known as Tompolo) being fingered as leading the pack, while the insurgents in the North-East zone have taken the Nigerian government to the cleaners through hate speech which many consider as unguarded statements from those who have made themselves enemies of their fatherland.

In essence, Nigerians are oftentimes polarised along regional, ethnic and religious lines in their expressions, using negative and injurious statements capable of reducing the social media platform into a chaotic and indiscreet battlefield where participants engage in war of words (Jibril & Simon, 2017). No wonder some media personalities, including the Special Adviser to President Muhammadu Buhari on Media and Publicity, Femi Adesina, the Publisher of *Premium Times*, an online medium, Dapo Olorunyomi and a former Chairman, Senate Committee on Judiciary, Human Rights and Legal Matters, Umar Dahiru Tambuwal, admonished politicians to avoid hate speech in their campaigns and utterances so as not to create tension in the country. Speaking at a conference on Hate Speech and Campus Journalism Awards Ceremony, organised by *Youths Digest* in Abuja, they warned that hate speech does nobody any good and must, therefore, be avoided by politicians and religious leaders in the interest of the corporate existence of the country. Adesina specifically reminded the political class of the need for them to learn from the evil that had befallen some countries as a result of hate speech which created tension and civil disturbances, stating further that Nigerians must check and guard personal utterances, especially unsubstantiated allegations capable of provoking misunderstanding among various groups and political class. For Olorunyomi, whose lecture at the occasion centred on "Curbing Hate Speech on Social Media," effective use of education and debate must be employed against hate speech so as to ensure sustainability of Nigeria's democracy, even as he appealed to owners

of online media to uphold credibility and integrity, and ensure credibility, accuracy and truthfulness in the process leading to news gathering and dissemination.

There seems to be more concern over what can be termed as the inglorious roles of the new media in the propagation of hate speech and its attendant implication on peace and security of Nigeria.

It was in the midst of this that the Senate had, in 2018, attempted to pass a bill that would curb hate speech in the country into law. The Hate Speech Bill referred to content that promotes violence against or has the primary purpose of inciting hatred against individuals or groups based on certain attributes, such as race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, veteran status, sexual orientation/gender identity. The bill, introduced by the Senate Deputy Chief Whip, Abdullahi Aliyu Sabi, in March 2018, prescribed death by hanging for any person found guilty of any form of hate speech resulting in the death of another person. It also sought for the establishment of an Independent National Commission for Hate Speeches, which was expected to enforce hate speech laws in the country and ensure the "elimination" of hate speech. According to the bill, for offences such as harassment on grounds of ethnicity or race, the offender shall be sentenced to "not less than a five-year jail term or a fine of not less than N10 million or both" (Iroanusi, 2019). It also proposed that "a person who uses, publishes, presents, produces, plays, provides, distributes and/or directs the performance of any material, written and/or visual, which is threatening, abusive or insulting or involves the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, commits an offence, if such person intends to stir up ethnic hatred or having regard to all the circumstances, ethnic hatred is likely to be stirred up against any person or person from such an ethnic group in Nigeria. Part of the provisions of the bill also was that "If a person subjects another to harassment on the basis of ethnicity for the purposes of this section where, on ethnic grounds or he unjustifiably engages in a conduct which has the purpose or effect of (a) violating other person's dignity or (b) creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person subjected to the harassment. The charge would be justified if such a person intends to stir up "ethnic hatred", according to the bill (*Premium Times*, November 13, 2019)

However, hardly had the bill passed the first reading stage than it had been receiving lots of criticisms and agitations by various groups and stakeholders, most of whom were clamouring for a review of the capital punishments prescribed in the bill or for the discountenance of the bill in its entirety. Many also perceived the bill as an attempt by the federal government to place limitations on the freedom of expression of the citizens, a fundamental human right enshrined in the



1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), while some others saw it as a bill which not only stood morality in the face but an offshoot of the antics of some political leaders who desired to further their personalised objectives (Eke, 2019). The controversial bill, which could not make it through to third reading owing to the barrage of criticisms that trailed it, came barely a week after the Senate had re-introduced a bill meant to regulate the use of social media. It also came about a month after President Muhammadu Buhari had threatened to take a “firm and decisive action” against promoters of hate speech and other divisive materials on the Internet, with Senator Aliyu Sabi stating that he was motivated into sponsoring the bill in view of several cases of religious and ethnic violence experienced in the past years in some parts of the country.

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## THE MEDIA AS PURVEYORS OF HATE SPEECH

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It has been argued that the major purveyor of hate speech, particularly in Nigeria, is the media. Perhaps this might have accounted for why some drastic measures had been taken to regulate the operations of the media, without necessarily appearing as if the fourth estate of the realm was being gagged. Suffice to say that the National Broadcasting Commission, an agency of the Federal Government established by Section 1 of the National Broadcasting Commission Act, Cap. NII, Laws of the Federation, 2004 and vested with the responsibilities of regulating and controlling the broadcasting industry in Nigeria, including ensuring compliance with laid down codes of conduct and practice, had, on February 3, 2023, imposed N2 million fine each on two prominent television outfits, Television Continental (TVC) and Arise Television, for allegedly breaching some sections of Nigeria Broadcasting Code in the countdown to the 2023 general elections. The commission, in separate letters written to the management of the affected organisation by its Director-General, Balarabe Shehu Ilelah, ordered them to pay the fine within two weeks of the receipt of the letter notifying them of the fine of have their sanctions graduated. It particularly accused TVC of allowing derogatory and unfair comments to be broadcast on its station, citing the joint media directorate of the APC Presidential Campaign Council press briefing where Festus Keyamo, the Minister of State for Labour and Employment of Nigeria and member of the council, said: “Obasanjo and Atiku run a criminal enterprise, an empire of fraud in Abuja....” and alleged that some goons of Atiku Abubakar were planning to eliminate Michael Achimugu, a whistle blower. The commission also excoriated TVC of not giving equal news coverage to other political parties in all their news bulletins, even as it slammed Arise Global Media of giving

prominence to unfair contents which were glorified on Arise news programme ‘What is Trending’ (ThisDay, February 3, 2023). A part of the letter read: Broadcasting shall promote human dignity; therefore, hate speech is prohibited. The broadcaster shall not transmit any programme, programme promotion, community service announcement or station identity which is likely, in any circumstance, to provoke or perpetuate in a reasonable person, intense dislike, serious contempt or severe ridicule against a person or groups of people because of age, colour, gender, national or ethnic origin, disability race, religion or political leaning” (The Nation, February 3, 2023). Another case in point as far as hate speech is concerned was that of Sadiya Haruna, a Kannywood actress, who was sentenced to six months in prison without an option of fine for defaming a colleague, Isa A. Isa in a video and posting same on her social media pages. Haruna had, in the viral Instagram video post, accused Isa of being a homosexual, a bastard and an unrepentant womanizer, alleging that the actor demanded anal sex from her (Daily Post, February 7, 2022).

Another public exhibition of hate speech was the altercation between some Arewa youths and a former Minister of Aviation, Chief Femi Fani-Kayode, where the former told the people of the South-West zone never to expect that they (North) would hand over to them. Fani-Kayode was said to have been so infuriated to the extent of lambasting the ‘uncultured’ northern youths. “Who are you? Are you God? Do you own power? Were you born to rule? Are southerners your slaves? You came from Futa Jalon in 1804 and met us here. Stop your f\*ckery or there may not be a Nigeria left in 2023,” an enraged Fani-Kayode said in his response to the vituperations by the Arewa youth. It was in the midst of this that another famous Kannywood actress, Sadiya Kabala, cautioned her colleagues against the growing rate of hate speech on the social media targeted at their colleagues in the industry. “I appeal to them (colleagues) to learn to settle their scores outside the social media in order to maintain their self-respect. It is not proper providing a platform for their fans to be insulting their colleagues in the industry or outside,” she was quoted as saying (The Eagle Online, April 17, 2019). In the words of Ezeibe (2015), Hate speech in Nigeria is mostly credited to political leaders and their ethnic, regional or religious-based supporters. According to him, it is in the characters of the political leaders to neglect the provocative tendencies of hate speech so long as it enables them to capture and retain political power.

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## HATE SPEECH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON PEACE BUILDING IN NIGERIA

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Unarguably, hate speech comes with adverse consequences on efforts at ensuring peace building in Nigeria. Several

conflicts have ensued as a result of hate speech, especially during electioneering campaigns. The roles and effects of the media in peace building are also said to be both destructive and constructive, especially as regards the issue of building sustainable peace and preventing recurrence of conflicts (Chirunga and Mbwirire, 2020). To Ezeibe (2015), the problem of hate speech is rife amongst members of diverse ethnic groups, point out that hate speech against an ethnic group can quickly degenerate and heat up the polity, thus resulting in violence, with adverse challenges on democratic institutions and peace building. Quoting a 2015 report published by Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD), he observes that Nigerians disseminate hate speech across social media platforms and that 70 per cent of the people doing so have visible online identities – meaning that they can be traced and they make use of English Language which is understandable to majority of Nigerians. The report states that 65 per cent of participants in the research are males and use identifiable coded language capable of generating violence and harm. In a nutshell, hate speech has been implicated in most of the electoral violence that had bedeviled Nigeria and which has, either directly or indirectly worked against the efforts at enhancing peace building in the country.

## CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, it can be safely asserted that the issue of hate speech is not a new phenomenon but a recurrent one in Nigeria, while it has done what could be termed an incalculable damage to the national psyche and halted hitherto seeming gains of peace building. Concerted efforts should, therefore, be made to sensitize citizens on the need to end the menace of hate speech by being conscious of their utterances so as not to incite hatred and plunge the country into needless crises, capable of halting peace building and threatening its continued corporate existence. Important personalities and stakeholders in the Nigerian project, such as religious leaders, politicians, traditional rulers and heads of ethnic associations and groups must be at the vanguard of campaigning against hate speech, not just when it is from the other group but when such speeches are made by one of their own. That way, people will begin to realise the menace of hate speech and permanently discard it as it is a tool for destabilization (Inobemhe, Salisu, Santas, Ude and Asemah, 2021). There is also the need for delving into and tackling the root cause(s) and the drivers of hate speech, with a view to instilling sanity into the polity, while the media should uphold the spirit and letters of the ethics of journalism, promote peaceful co-existence through balanced reporting, uphold national interest above personal or sectional interest and be a veritable tool of uniting Nigerians who are already polarized along ethnic

and religious lines. Added to this is the fact that journalists must be preoccupied with reporting the truth and be guided by other values which include national security, public interest, privacy and freedom of others. It is only living up to its responsibilities and reclaiming its pride of place as credible platforms that the effects of hate speech and its implications on peace building will no longer be hanged on the neck of the media.

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