

Peace Education, Self-Discipline and Personal Integrity: Antidotes to Hate-Speech and Vacillating Democracy in Nigeria for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Hate-speech has been heating up the polity in Nigeria, and has heightened insecurity and polarization of the citizens along ethnic, tribal and religious divides, with a vacillating democracy, thus hindering sustainable development. This paper is an attempt at finding solutions to hate-speech in Nigeria, to stabilize democracy, and engender sustainable development, in line with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Using the method of conceptual, textual and critical analysis, the paper discusses hate-speech, its causes, and its effects on Nigerian democracy and sustainable development. Reasons for hate-speech and how it can be curtailed or totally eliminated are also discussed. The findings show that hate-speech is a big setback to Nigerian democracy. It is also found that four major reasons are responsible for its continued spread. These are: absence of strong peace education; absence of clear delineation of utterances that constitute hate speech in Nigeria, with a legal framework; selective justice, where some citizens are treated as untouchables and above the law; and lack of self-discipline and personal integrity on the part of the hate-speech makers. In the light of the findings, the paper concludes that hate-speech is a venom with lethargic effects on Nigerian democracy and sustainable development, and should be decisively dealt with. As antidotes to hate-speech, the paper advocates strong peace education; enactment of law which clearly states utterances that constitute hate speech in Nigeria, with appropriate sanctions for offenders; and equal treatment of all citizens under the law. It is also advocated that citizens, especially the highly placed in the society, should make it a point of duty, in conscience and for social order, to cultivate the practice of self-discipline and personal integrity, as this will even be more beneficial to the self and the society than acting under fear of law.

Keywords: Self-Discipline, Hate-Speech, Integrity, Education, Development

Introduction

Spoken words have very subtle ways of penetrating the innermost being of humans and stirring them to actions. If such words are positive, edifying and encouraging, they would invariably evoke positive actions or reactions, either in words or deeds. On the contrary, if the utterances are negative, degrading and discouraging, they would evoke negative actions or reactions. Such words are deemed to be coming from hate, and so are termed hate speeches. The United Nations Organization (UNO) (2019) states that hate speech refers to an offensive discourse targeting a group or an individual based on inherent characteristics such as race, religion, or gender, and that may threaten social peace. It is worthy of note that hate-speech is hate-oriented and usually targeted at a victim. In this regard, Idoko (2021) states that “hate speeches impinge on the dignity and integrity of others because it is completely hate-oriented or hate motivated with it, unnecessary expressions cast on targeted victims to smear their well-esteemed identity” (pp. 17-18).

In Nigeria, lots of words go out of people’s mouths every moment, in one way or another. Incidentally, Nigerians are very sensitive to spoken words, and believe so much in the power of words, especially when spoken by persons of influence and significance in the society. It is normal for people to yearn for good speeches that edify them and uplift the society. However, of recent, hate-speech has been on the increase in Nigeria by Nigerians, despite the fact that there is a law that prohibits it. Hate-speech has become one of the saddening experiences of Nigerians.

There are many literatures on hate-speech in Nigeria, but their emphases are arguably not really from the point of view of peace education, self-discipline and personal integrity, but mainly from legal and civic viewpoints (Iroanusi, 2019; Yola, 2017; Isola & Mohan, 2018; Uzoka, 2019). To fill this gap is the aim of this paper. In doing this, the paper explores the concept of hate-speech, its effects on Nigerian democracy and sustainable development as well as the reasons for hate- speech, and then argues that focusing on peace education, self-discipline and personal integrity can be effective means of curtailing it. Philosophical methods of conceptual, textual and critical analyses are employed.

In the context of this paper, legal and civic approach are not the points of focus. These are fraught with controversies bordering on freedom of expression, legal interpretations, human rights protection, and other diverse views, which invariably end the debate in a dead-end or weakened framework that offers no meaningful remedy. Rather, educative and rational approach is used, where appeal is made to the self on the basis of the integrity and dignity of the human person as a rational being, capable of self-conviction and willingness to embrace decorum, on account of dictates of reason and conscience, regardless of the presence or absence of legal sanctions. It is hoped that the findings of the study will go a long way, if put into practice, in helping the citizens to curb hate-speech. It is believed that when people are well educated on the implications of hate-speech, the value of self-discipline and the worth of personal integrity, they will be more disposed and willing to avoid hate-speech.

What is Hate-Speech?

Hate-speech can come in many ways and shades of meanings. Moreover, hate-speech can be brought about through different forms of expression, such as cartoons, images, objects, gestures, memes, symbols and other body languages. It can be spread orally or by writing, and it can be done online or offline (United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate-Speech, 2019). For this reason, it is not easy to say precisely that hate-speech is this or that, which will have a universal acceptance under international law. However, many scholars, philosophers, organizations and private individuals have made lots of contributions towards helping people to understand what hate-speech is. So it can be said that hate-speech means so many things to so many people, in accordance with the circumstances and contexts of the speech. However, in order to have a framework for the United Nations to address the matter globally, the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate-Speech (2019) defines hate-speech as “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” (p. 2).

From the above view, it can be seen that hate-speech is a great issue of concern. It is a bad use of language against people. Language plays a fundamental role in the creation of shared knowledge and it can be used to create a basis for aggression against targeted groups. It incites violence, paves the road for,

and enables, atrocities (European Union External Action, 2022). According to Curtis (2023), hate-speech is an expression which tarnishes the reputation of a person or persons, the grounds of their belonging to a social group characterized as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, physical or mental disability. He further argues that typical hate-speech includes statements that are intended to promote malice, incite hatred or promote hatred against a person or a group.

From the various perspectives about hate-speech, certain truths are constant: That hate-speech is detestable, that it incites hatred and violence, that it is discriminatory, that it is aimed at a person or persons as its target(s) with the intention of denigrating them, and that it can take various forms, including utterances, writings, body languages and symbolic gestures. Hate-speech, therefore, is any utterance or written expression, body sign, representation, gesticulation or symbol that is directed against a person or a group of persons in order to denigrate them just because of who they are as per their race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexual-orientation, physical/mental challenge, or simply on the grounds of their being disliked.

Causes of Hate-Speech

Many things can be pointed out as causes of hate-speech. Gorka (2019) presents some of the causes as the urge to release tension, frustration, helplessness, quest for power, and lack of self-control. Other causes include stereotype mentality, inferiority complex, sadism, rancorous family background, and

ethnic and religious bigotry. Effort is forthwith made to expatiate on these causes.

Tension: In this context, tension is taken to mean a situation or condition of being tense, that is, being under stress, unrelaxed, unsettled, strained, restlessness, or signs thereof. These are psychological conditions which can tear a person apart amidst conflicting forces within the self. Under such conditions, one can engage in hate-speech as a means of releasing the tension within.

Frustration: This is a situation where a person nurses some feelings of anger or annoyance due to their inability to attain their aims or make some achievements. Due to the current situation of things in the country, many people are getting frustrated by the day. Experiences of economic hardship and marginalization often cause people to engage in hate-speech. One of the resultant effects is venting the anger on others through foul speeches.

Helplessness: People can find themselves sometimes at the cross-roads of life, where confusion, indecision, no sense of direction, and total dilemma become the only available realities. These constitute a state of helplessness. Haters' helplessness often makes them resort to verbal violence, which becomes for them "a way of fighting for being respected in their environment" (Gorka, 2019, p. 237). This can take place in physical confrontations or on the internet.

Quest for Power: Power and control are intimately connected. One with power, especially political and economic power, can control a lot of things and events in the society, and even their fellow humans. To

grab this power, people, especially political opponents, often engage in war of words, in which case they use denigrating languages to misrepresent their opponents in the eyes of the electorate and citizens, and even before the international community.

Lack of Self-Control: Self-control is an ability to hold oneself in check in the face of provocation, or deliberate self-restraint so as not to err. It is "controlling one's attention, behaviour, thoughts, and/or emotions to override a strong internal predisposition or external lure" (Diamond, 2013, p. 136). Every spoken word is a manifestation of the speaker's thought. So, control of one's thought is the first step towards the control of one's speech. Those who lose control of their thoughts can find themselves engaging in hate-speech.

Stereotype: This refers to a general idea or image, but fixated and simplistic, held about a person, or a group of persons. People often have a stereotype mentality of others as inferior, naïve, money-conscious, less educated, ignorant, superior, brave, wise, more educated, and a host of other positive and negative modifiers. This type of mentality results in profiling of people, thereby generating hate-speech of various weights. Some people feel that they are superior to others, and vice versa. Britannica Dictionary (2023) defines stereotype as an often unfair and untrue belief that many people have about all people or things with a particular characteristic. This is one of the causes of hate-speech in Nigeria, where the diverse ethnic groups often engage in profiling one another, all with negative intents and purposes.

Inferiority Complex: This is a basic and consistent feeling of inadequacy and insecurity, which arises from one's imagined or real deficiency of the self in comparison to others, which can result in behavioural manifestations such as withdrawal out of timidity, or excessive competition and aggression (Hoffman, 2023). A mild term for inferiority complex is low self-esteem. People of this kind usually feel their incompetence and low performance; but instead of dealing with the situation by finding where their strength lies and focusing on that for their improvement, they keep on brooding over their limitations, start being withdrawn and avoiding others around them whom they think are doing better. Such people often indulge in hate-speech in a bid to boost their ego and self-importance.

Sadism: This is a personality disorder. In psychiatry, it is referred to as sadistic personality disorder. According to Henri, Nikki, Rachel and Natalene (2009), those who possess sadistic personalities have the tendency of displaying aggression and cruel behaviour in an attempt to control and dominate others, and increase their level of violence when resisted. Many sadists abuse others verbally and emotionally with the purpose of manipulating them through use of fear and humiliation, while some of them are mainly occupied with violence rather than abuse.

Rancorous Family Background: Family plays a significant and long lasting role in people's life.

Some families are known for quarrelling, abusive words, disparagement and callousness. This is witnessed mainly in

polygamous families. People from such family backgrounds are most likely to use abusive words on others outside their families.

Ethnic and Religious Bigotry: In Nigeria, ethnicity and religion have great influence on issues, be it at the national level, group level or individual level. The Cambridge Dictionary (2023) defines bigotry as the fact of having and expressing strong, unreasonable beliefs and disliking other people who have a different way of life. Ethno-religious bigotry is, therefore, unreasonable and fanatical adherence to one's ethno-religious beliefs, opinions and practices to the prejudice of other people and their ethnicity and religion. According to Salawu (2010), "There is a consensus of opinion among observers that Nigeria provides one of the best examples or case studies of ethno-religious conflicts" (p. 345). The same Salawu (2010) goes on to explain ethno-religious conflict as "a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation" (p. 345).

Apparently, ethno-religious bigotry is the greatest cause of hate speech in Nigeria. In the words of Adum, Orjiakor and Nnatu (2019), "In Nigeria nobody talks Nigeria. Nigerians are first Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw, Tiv, Efik, Berom, Itsekiri, etc; Nigerians are first of all what they are by way of ethnic nationalities. This breeds suspicion, disharmony and oftentimes hate" (p. 50).

Fake news, especially through online media where anonymity is maintained, can also cause hate-speech. The desire to demean others is also one of the causes of hate-speech in Nigeria.

Effects of Hate-Speech on Nigerian Democracy and Sustainable Development

A saying has it that whatever has a cause must have an effect. It is a common knowledge to an average Nigerian that the nation's democracy is oscillating, and so is her sustainable development. Hate-speech inflicts painful experiences of trauma, belittlement, humiliation, anger, bitterness, resentment, and lots more, on its victims. Hate-speech is a sign of disrespect and lack of mutual trust. In a democracy, mutual trust and respect are very important. One of the reasons for this is that democracy is a dynamic phenomenon, with diverse characteristics in its human agents, ideologies, principles and practices. Some of the values of democracy include respect for human rights, equality of all citizens before the law, tolerance, dialogue and public order. Hate-speech, however, dismantles all these, thereby constituting a hindrance to democratic processes. According to Pate and Ibrahim (2019), words that are insulting, abusive, or contemptuous towards others on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, language affiliation, or places of origin, are closely related to hate-speech, and are capable of creating chaotic situations. Surely, chaotic situations are inimical to democracy.

In a democracy, it is expected that good conduct should be the order of the day, so as to promote good understanding and relationship among the citizens. Reacting to

the issue of hate-speech and democracy, Jonathan (2022) argues that, before now, Nigerians were afraid of the gun as a threat to democracy, but now the biggest threat to democracy is the issue of propaganda, fake news and hate-speech.

Hate-speech demoralizes its victims and often traumatizes them. As a result of this, they can be reluctant in taking active part in programmes that promote democracy and sustainable development. Hate-speech is particularly dangerous to democracy because, although it happens at other times, it is intensified in periods of elections. Elections are the periods for strengthening democracy, when the electorate freely choose their leaders at various levels of governance by casting their votes. Hate-speech has, however, led to violence, disenfranchisement and voter intimidations, thereby truncating the will of the electorate. This has constituted a big setback to Nigerian democracy. The 2023 general election is a veritable case in hand in this regard.

Hate-speech undermines the fundamental human rights. Fundamental human rights are the foundations of democracy. So, by infringing on these rights, hate-speech is heating up the very ground on which democracy takes root, stands and thrives. Moreover, hate-speech breeds polarization among the people. Democracy cannot properly function where the citizens are polarized, especially along ethnic and religious lines. The United Nations Human Rights (2019) maintains that hate-speech has been mainstreamed into political systems all over the world, thus threatening democratic values, social cohesion and peace.

Anything that affects democracy will automatically affect sustainable development, since democracy and development are intertwined. In the light of this, it is clear that hate-speech has great adverse effects on Nigerian democracy and sustainable development.

Reasons for the Continued Spread of Hate-Speech

Hate-speech is like an ill wind that blows no one any good. People do not like it, yet it keeps spreading like wild fire. The European Union External Action (2022) laments that hate-speech and hate crime are widespread and have been on the increase of recent, fueling hatred and conflict within societies. In the same vein, the United Nations Human Rights (2019) raises an alarm regarding the increase in hateful messages and incitement to discrimination and hatred against minority groups, various ethnic groups and defenders of their rights.

A number of reasons can be adduced for the continued spread of hate-speech in Nigeria, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Lack of clear definition in law of what constitutes hate-speech
- Lack of political will to punish hate-speech offenders
- Lack of self-control
- Religious and ethnic fanaticism
- Sycophancy among politicians and their foot soldiers
- Lack of proper education on peace
- Misinformation about persons and issues
- Social media fake news

- Lack of appreciation of the dignity of the human person
- Acting on hearsay without verification
- Absence of sense of personal integrity

The above reasons (and perhaps more) explain the continued spread of hate-speech in Nigeria. In terms of legal framework, hate-speech has no backing in international law, rather hate crime is recognized. The legal problem associated with hate-speech is whether such laws are not infringing on freedom of expression. So, there is no clear definition of hate-speech as such, rather it is defined and explained in contexts. In Nigeria, the hate-speech bill, as proposed by the National Assembly, is already fraught with controversies and agitations by various groups, especially regarding capital punishment envisaged by the bill (Eke, 2020). Olusola and Mohan (2018) are of the view that although laws exist, there is an apparent lack of political will to implement them. When people are not punished for offences committed, potential offenders will actualize their own sides, and this is what happens in the area of hate-speech in Nigeria.

Nowadays, some people find it difficult to exercise control over themselves, especially their emotions and tongues. Lack of self-restraint has been a major reason for hate-speech spread. Religious and ethnic fanaticism are also significant. Some Nigerians talk down on others and refuse to accept the known truth simply on the basis of religion and ethnicity. Sycophancy among politicians and their foot soldiers have their own sides too, where some engage in hate-speech just to please their paymasters and

curry favour from them. Lack of proper education on peace is another reason that needs an urgent attention. Majority of Nigerians do not know much about peace education, and so they are unable to use words that promote peace rather than violence. Another reason is misinformation about persons and issues. Some people deliberately distort information to achieve their ulterior motives, which invariably leads to and provokes hate-speech. Social media fake news is rampant today, and there are many out there who base their utterances on what they read from social media, even without verification, hence reason for the increasing spread of hate-speech. Some people have also lost sense of the dignity of the human person as well as personal integrity. That is why those who engage in hate-speech fail to see it as belittling to their own personal integrity, nor as an affront to the dignity of the human person.

Peace Education, Self-Discipline and Personal Integrity

Having gone through some relevant areas regarding hate-speech and its effects, it is pertinent to consider peace education, self-discipline and personal integrity as antidotes to hate-speech.

Peace education

Peace education is all about empowering people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and general approaches that will enable them to avoid violence and to deal with conflicts in non-violent ways. Harris and Morrison (2013) state that “peace education is considered to be both a philosophy and a process involving skills, including listening,

reflection, problem-solving, cooperation and conflict resolution” (p.11). One of the major aims of peace education is to accelerate learning conditions that will facilitate the potential for inner transformation of the learner, and the inner transformation will pave the way for conducive atmospheres in constructing positive social change (Reardon, 1988).

Peace education will help people to understand the following UNESCO’s initiative as recounted by Harris and Morrison (2013):

power as defined as active nonviolence; people being mobilized to build understanding, not to defeat a common enemy; democratic process to replace vertical and hierarchical power structure and authority; free flow of information replacing secrecy; male dominated culture replaced by power sharing with women, men and children; feminine cultures as centers of peacebuilding (including connectedness, power sharing) replacing traditional structure glorifying war and the preparations for war; exploitation of the environment, closely associated with warfare, replaced by cooperative sustainability (p.26).

Through peace education, people will have greater awareness of the implications of the words they use, both on themselves and the society at large. It will also enhance their sense of values, especially the value of the human person and value of peace. Peace education in this way is not limited to school environments alone. Other settings such as families, communities, age groups, professional associations, are fertile grounds for peace education, using various methods and technics. Peace education is not also restricted to a certain groups of people. It is for all (children, youths and adults).

Self-Discipline

Self-discipline is one's ability to go forward by the self, remain motivated, take decisions and actions, in spite of one's physical and emotional feelings. It is putting off one's immediate comfort in order to achieve a long term goal which is of a higher value than the immediate comfort. Self-discipline is based on choice and determination. One has to choose what one must do or not do, and stand by it against all odds. For instance, when one has something worthwhile to pursue and achieve, one has to intentionally choose and pursue it, and also choose to endure all factors of discouragement such as unfavourable conditions, distractions, inconveniences, hard labour involved, and the pessimistic opinions of others. On the other hand, one may decide not to do or say something. In that case, one has also to take a stand and refuse to be swayed by apparently plausible arguments to the contrary, even if one's own physical and emotional powers urge one to give way. Self-discipline is all

about making good and wise choices and standing by them perseveringly.

People who value self-discipline and apply it in their conducts are enabled to be in control of themselves, their actions and reactions in any situation. Self-discipline requires effort and frank acceptance of the reality in the scheme of things and about oneself. After accepting the reality on ground, one has to design a constructive way to handle matters, instead of ranting and hurting people with words that would better be left unspoken. To maintain self-discipline, people must endeavour to control their emotions with their reasons.

Personal Integrity

Integrity is one of the essential qualities that human beings need in order to succeed in life. According to Edubirdie (2023), integrity is living with honesty, fairness and loyalty, having strong moral principles and practices, being oneself, not involving in compromising essential values in all of one's endeavours, showing understanding, being wholesome, balancing reason and emotion in decision makings, the quality of being honest, complete and strong-willed. It is the virtue of being honest, with firm ethical principles. It is a commitment to basic values such as respect, trust, fairness, justice, responsibility, honesty and accountability. Integrity enhances the quality of human life, makes a person trustworthy, and improves the personality of the one who practises it. A person of integrity naturally commands respect among their colleagues. It encourages sense of purpose and values, and raises the standard of doing things. Integrity has a positive impact on the society, as it breeds

honesty. For instance, a person of integrity will focus on their responsibilities even when no one is watching.

With the above definitions and descriptions of integrity, it can be argued that a person of integrity can hardly engage in hate-speech. Personal integrity is a sign of self-respect. If people resort to hate-speech, it is an indication that they lack self-discipline, and, by implication, self-respect.

Conclusion

From the points raised in the course of this discourse, it can be seen that hate-speech is a venom with lethargic effects on Nigerian democracy and sustainable development, and should be decisively dealt with. It can also be clearly seen that peace education, self-discipline and personal integrity are three strong pillars that can effectively checkmate hate-speech in Nigeria. Peace education believes that human beings are capable of changing violent behaviours and beliefs, as well as imbibing moral imperatives required for having a better world, and so teaches alternatives to violence such as empathy, dialogue, negotiation, and inner and outer transformation.

Self-discipline, on its part, brings about self-control, which restrains unnecessary utterances that would provoke hatred and violence. With this restraint, the spread of hate-speech is minimized and controlled. With regard to personal integrity, it is pertinent to bear in mind that human beings have a dignity which transcends all the earthly values, since they are created in the image of God. The recognition of this dignity, both for oneself and others, will

convince one that hate-speech is a belittling of oneself as well as the other.

Based on these roles of peace education, self-discipline and personal integrity, the conclusion is that these are really antidotes to hate-speech, and so their practice by the citizens will no doubt douse hate-speech, stabilize the nation's democracy, and catalyze sustainable development. This will be more effective than acting in fear of legal sanctions.

Recommendations

In the light of the above conclusion, the following recommendations are put forth:

1. Peace education, self-discipline and personal dignity should be emphasized and inculcated in the process of education, be it formal, informal or non-formal, in the families and communities.
2. Governments are urged to clearly define what constitutes hate-speech and implement the extant laws on hate-speech without fear or favour.
3. Individuals, families and groups, and in fact all the citizens, especially the highly placed in the society, should make it a point of duty, in conscience and for social order, to cultivate the practice of self-discipline and personal integrity.

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