HATE SPEECH: A VANGUARD OF SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE AND COLLAPSE OF COMMONALITY

Ikechukwu Onah
Department at Philosophy
University of Nigeria Nsukka
Kingsley.onah@unn.edu.ng
DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.26043.64803
&
Solomon, Chidi Alexander
Department of Philosophy
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Solomonchidi32@gmail.com
DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.26043.64803

Abstract
This work analyzed the atomic Bomb called Hate Speech and its effect in a given society. Given the compounded reason for the agents of this lethal output from human mouth and hand, this work using analytical method tried to x-ray the concept and interrogate it for better understanding and envisioned possible cure for a disease that has disintegrated many nations and caused devastating violence across many societies. Information from some literatures was helpful which include textbooks, social media, and journals. Findings of this work showed that the effect of Hate Speech can deteriorate rapidly when antagonistic speech reaches a large audience by means of electronic media, print and social media. This had led to large number of casualties and even attempted extermination of a race. Hence, this work recommended that Moral education should be made compulsory in primary to university level of learning. This will help in eroding prejudice and reduce the penchant for xenophobic attacks, tribalism and racism.

Introduction

Hate speech have been observed throughout history, and its consequence has been remarkable in several ways. Hostile portrayals and stereotyping of groups can lead to dehumanizing reaction. The effect has the potentials of escalating rapidly especially when hostile portrayals and stereotyping reach a large population by means of mass media, and consequently, lead to real-life violent hate crimes such as genocide, xenophobia, racism etc. In recent years, the world has witnessed a significant increase of xenophobic, religiophobic, racist attacks etc. These attacks are so violent that lives get lost, and properties worth billions go down the drain.

With the revolution in the modern media, the dissemination of hate speech has gained momentum. Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp etc. have introduced new modes of social interactive participation and their users now contribute to dissemination of prejudice, fake news and hostility against other groups on an unprecedented scale. The wide scale dissemination of hate speech in digital media constitute safety emergency with individuals, race, religious groups etc. This notwithstanding, caution has to be applied in tagging an utterance hateful. The danger is that those pushing for the regulation of hate speech may end up tagging every instance of unfavourable criticism as hate speech, while those against the regulation of hate speech may tag hateful utterance as free speech. Like as the proverb goes; 'if all one has is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. On the other hand, if one is made to believe that it is wrong to use a hammer to crack a nut, then everything starts to look like a nut.'

This paper aims to analyze the concept of hate speech, practices, consequences, and strategies on how to effectively counter instance of hate speech especially, within the cyber space. However, the solution suggested here on how to counter instances of hate speech may not be final, due to the fact that different countries have different laws, and hateful utterance within the cyber space transcends national boundaries, hence strategies are still solicited to increase impact of counter actions to hate speech.

Conceptual Clarification

What is the responsibility of the state in ensuring that the citizens enjoy their fundamental right to free expression? and at the same time, preventing an abuse of that right. Opinions are divided on what the best possible answer to this question would be. For some, the state should allow the citizens right to free speech to the level where it does not become insulting, degrading, defaming, negatively stereotyping, discrimination and inciting of hatred and violence against a person or group of people based on their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc. this according to them "implicates issues of harm, dignity, security, healthy cultural dialogue, democracy, and legitimacy" (Alexander Brown, 2017:1).

On the other side of the divide are those opposed to the regulation of hate speech. For them, hate speech regulation has a negative effect on the freedom of speech, and this is counterproductive and damaging to the principles of democracy. For them, those determined at regulating hate speech harbor a secret,

as such, the intention is to regulate all speech perceived as treat to their secret, even speech that ought not to be regulated. Attempts to make laws regulating hate speech have warrants strong morally opposing reactions, and given that, "legal meanings will themselves draw on a range of deeper values and principles about which people reasonably disagree, it is no surprise that there remains such divergence over how to define the very term that stands at the epicentre of the disagreement" (Alexander Brown, 2017:4). This does not imply that hate speech is strictly a legal concept, nor can it be regulated only legally.

Although hateful utterance has been in use in history, the term was coined in the 1980s by some legal scholars in the United States in response to hateful racist speech. The term was first used in 1989 by Mari Matsuda in her seminal paper 'Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the Victim's Story', where she highlighted the failure of the United States legal system in providing adequate means of seeking legal or criminal redress for victims of hateful racist speech (Alexander Brown, 2017:6). Hate speech is often associated with problematic speech viewed as xenophobic, religious extremism, racist, misogynistic, and it is often targeted at minority groups, and often results in the violation of their dignity, solidarity, tolerance etc.

Hate speech has been employed to describe different kind of utterance mostly signaling disapproval. The term has come to occupy I vital space in the contemporary usage in identifying expressions that exposes people to danger on the basis of their conceived difference. However, it is not every speech that has the potential of stirring up hatred that could be termed hate speech as such. Take for instance, the recounting of once personal experience with a particular group may stir up hate in the last analysis, without the speech being tagged hateful speech. It is for this reason that the victims of slavery, religious extremism etc. may incite hate while recounting their experience, yet we cannot hold them responsible for hate speech.

By syntax, hate speech is a compound noun, and by semantics, its meaning is not a function of its constituent parts, as such, conceptualizing it on the basis of the literal meaning of its constituent part will not help us to properly understand the concept. However, the meaning can be inferred because the words 'hate' and 'speech' provides a clue. According to Alexander Brown, (2017:44) 'hate' in hate speech is operating as an attributional metaphor, which means that it refer to something which possess a quality that can also be attributed to the phenomena referred to by 'hate speech.' Thus, 'hate' does not contribute, but attributes the reference to hate in the term 'hate speech'. This is signaled by the fact that it is

not every instance of hate inciting utterance that counts as hate speech, and some instance of hate speech does not incite hate. The word 'hate' indicates the attribute of hate and reference to this quality gives a clue to the meaning of hate speech. As such, 'hate' in hate speech tell us that a speech has the quality of hate.

One feature of hate as an emotion is that it is intentional i.e, it tends towards or against something, person or group of people. Thus the word 'hate' in hate speech indicates that the speech is targeted at or directed towards something, someone, or group of people. Hate does not exist independent of a perceiving mind, and as such, the subject whose heart harbors hate selects object, person or group to target with hate. When this hate is combined with speech, it appeals to the audience to exhibit and express the same emotion of hate towards the target.

Hate makes reference to a feeling or emotion, and attributes this quality to 'hate speech'. This feeling or dispositional attitude of hate is negative, and can conceivably be motivational for human action. Given this understanding, hate speech is here defined as an expression that has the quality of hate, refereeing to a group or individual perceived to be different either because of their race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, disability, sexual orientation etc. with the aim of inciting hate, hostility, aggression, by words or deed against the targeted group.

The United Nation (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 factor." This kind of utterance originates from, and generates intolerance, hatred, and extremism and, in some context, it can lead to dehumanizing acts raging from discrimination to physical conflicts resulting in loose of lives and properties. Alexander Brown (2017:45) identifies that 'hate' "carries with it reference to its most distinctive qualities, such as intense or extreme dislike, aversion, loathing, antipathy, enmity or hostility toward or against something or someone." What this suggests is that hate speech targets at the identity of the victim. And at the heart of it is aversion or hostility towards the person or ground because of this identity.

How Hate Speech Works

From our analysis of the concept of hate speech, we contend that something is hate speech only if, it incites hatred toward any members of groups or classes of

persons identified by protected characteristics (Kylie Weston-Scheuber, 2012:139-40). Another way to categorize such speech is as 'hatred-inciting speech' or 'incitement to hatred'. Incitement to hatred involves the arousal of hatred in the audience or hearer toward members of some other group or class of persons on the basis of their identity. Thus we call something incitement to hatred if it is intended to cause emotions, feelings or attitude of hate or hatred in the mind of the audience even when the speaker does not purposely incite hatred but nevertheless does so through recklessness or negligence. Although some law stipulates different requirement weather to criminalize intentional incitement and incitement based on negligence. But we do not intend to go into that here.

Importantly, we notice that a speech may qualify as hateful even though the speaker is not motivated by hate. For instance, 'XYZ is disgusting as such, they deserves hostility.' The speaker may not be expressing his hate for XYZ, but because he is in a context where such utterance would earn him the support of his audience. Furthermore, hate speech is not restricted to inciting speech alone. A speech concerning a particular group of people or class of persons vulnerable to hate speech might not intend to incite hatred, and may also not incite hatred towards the group, yet such a speech qualifies for hate speech. For instance, assuming Mr. Peter walks up to Mr. Z a member of a group vulnerable to hate speech, and makes a hateful speech to him, not in a playful way, but as an expression of hate. In this case, Mr. Peter did not incite any one to hate Mr. Z, as there is no such audience to incite, yet his speech qualify as hate speech. This qualify as hate speech by virtue of what it aims at achieving, namely, to stir up self-hate, or intimidation of the victim by creating a feeling of fear and insecurity.

There is a relationship between fear and uncertainty, with the formation and maintaining of negative attitudes. (Bartlett & Krasodomski-Jones, 2015) contends that hate spreads online effortlessly than positive emotions. Hateful attitudes resulting in hate speech are partly motivated by fear and uncertainty. The subject with negative attitudes feels the zeal to protect himself from his target of hate, and goes on to call on others to do the same by making hateful speech. They feel that by making hateful speech, especially online, they will be relaxed, and satisfied. One advantage which online posting of hateful content has to them is that it makes the subject feel safe and secure due to the anonymity which it provides by making the subjects hide behind the screens of their gadgets. This gives a sense of freedom from the consequence of their hateful content which they would have faced in real-life interactions.

The anonymity resulting from online communication often allows people to formulate or choose camouflage online identity which essentially hides them behind a non-identifying username and image. This form of anonymity allows people to separate themselves from their true identity and moral virtue, thereby making them feel free to express hateful speech capable of resulting into hostility. The nature of online communication makes communication partners physically invisible to each other, allowing them not to notice the physical reactions like bodily movement and eye contact. Similarly, the social media allows several actions to occur at the same time, as such, individuals do not have to manage immediate reactions to the hate content they put online, and they can even disassociate themselves from hostile and intimidating comments resulting from their post.

Strategy to Counter Hate Speech

Suggestions on how to counter hate speech will be made from two perspectives, namely, the perspective of the one making hateful speech, and, from the perspective of the audience.

Internet and Media literacy: We live in an era of information technology where the internet has evolved into the most powerful medium for reaching wide verity of audience within a very short time. Today people learn, work, play, and communicate effectively using the internet. The internet has availed us access to multiple media where we find global news; on the environment, health, conflict etc. the manner with which these contents are presented has the tendency to affect the views and opinion of the audience about the issue and people talked about. Hence, it is important for internet users to be educated on how to publish contents online, and the audiences also have to be educated on the functionality of different media and how to access and digest published contents without feeling hurt. According to Pálmadóttir J. A. and Kalenikova L., "media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media; from television, radio, Internet, newspapers, social media, and all other forms of media and to use them in a responsible and critical manner… Media literacy is a part of the school curricula in Sweden, Ireland and the UK and more EU countries either have followed, or are likely to follow their example."

We have seen how hate speech could shape the attitude of its audience towards exhibiting hostility. In an experiment conducted by Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos and Ladwig (2014), they suggested what could make us more immune to hate speech. The authors investigated the role of "incivility", i.e. of

offensive way of expressing opinions, on formation of risk perceptions of nanotechnology, a topic unfamiliar to most internet users. They designed an experiment, in which participants were asked to read a scientific blog entry on the benefits and risks of nanosilver, followed by artificially crafted user comments formulated either in offensive or polite language; they were then asked to assess the risk associated with the new technology.

> The researchers made several interesting observations. Firstly, they found out that regardless of the offensiveness of what seemed as the apparent public reception, participants with preexisting familiarity with the topic perceived the risks of nanotechnology as lower than participants, for whom the issue was initially unfamiliar… The study also revealed, that participants with preexisting positive attitudes toward nanotechnology, when exposed to offensive comments, still perceived the risks of nanotechnology as lower than participants, whose initial attitudes weren't positive… This effect disappeared among participants exposed to polite discussion… To conclude: preexistent familiarity with the subject, preexisting positive attitudes and a low level of (activation of) religious identification, each of them independently, contributed to participants' immunity to the influence of offensive language on attitudes and encouraged them to form more favorable perceptions of risks of nanotechnology. On the other hand, lack of preexistent knowledge, lack of initial positive attitudes (and, similarly, high religiosity) made them more susceptible to the influence of offensive comments, which facilitated development of distrust toward unfamiliar phenomenon (Katarzyna Bojarska, :6).

There is an increased concern for the continuous increase in the use of the internet in circulating hate contents. Hence, the source of information plays a vital role in the formation of opinion or attitudes about a particular thing. Especially, if it is the first time to encounter such topic, and we consider the source of the information reliable, we unconsciously observe around us for confirmation of the information. Based on our observations, our attitudes and behavior are formed depending on convictions to let such information challenge our beliefs, this may result in the formation of favourable or hostile attitudes, and our actions are in turn built on this attitude. At a time like this, the need for media literacy cannot be over emphasized. Teaching people how to utilize the good benefits of social media and search engines without posing as treat to the psychological flourishing of others is at the moment one of the best way to counter hate speech. As a vital tool in the building a stable and reasonable

society where the right to the freedom of speech is not exercised at the detriment of others, media literacy will serve a good function of developing the skills critical thinking in the individual.

Reminding Individuals of the Consequence of their Speech
The danger of hate speech lies in its appeal to the emotions, feelings, or attitudes of hate or hatred that can incite or stir up actions or speech capable of treating the normal existence of the targeted group whether intentionally or by likelihood. An audience exposed to hate speech risks their attitude being shaped and their behavior influenced. With the technological revolution in the ICT, online hate speech constitute an avenue for increased hateful speech with a wide range of audience, consequently, poses threat to the psychological flourishing of the targeted person or group. For instance, the mass media was instrumental in spreading hate speech in the twentieth century, and this resulted in escalation of dehumanizing hate crimes, the most extreme of which were genocides such as Holocaust and Rwandan genocide (Fyfe S. 2017:).

In an experimented conducted by Munger 2017, he tested the response of male whites sanctioned for using hateful racist speech against follow tweeter users – he tweet a reminder 'hey man, remember that there are real people who are hurt when you harass them with that kind of language'. By reminding them of the psychological effect of such racial tweets, he observed the subjects for a period of one month, the result was that, the individual significantly reduced their use of racial sneer. When individuals are warned about their use of hateful utterances especially using modern media for such purposes, the result is that they tend to refrain from continuous dissemination of such hate contents. Such warning includes; reminding the individual of the effect of their speech on the targeted group both psychologically and physically since hateful utterances can result into actions. Also, reminding the individual of the permanence of such content and how they may be affected by it in the future etc.

Distressing Effect of Hate Speech in Nigerian Society

Hate speech has been the vehicle of ethnicity in Nigeria rising from the early days of independence from the Colonial rulers. It was the vanguard of the Nigerian/Biafra Civil war that led to about two million people losing their lives. Several religious and faith based riots and killing in Nigeria are attributed to have arisen from Hate Speech. The frequent post-election violence in Nigeria are direct effect of Hate speech by some disgruntled politicians whose stock in trade is just to gain power by all means possible. Nigeria currently is sitting on

gunpowder given the current hate speeches by youths and politicians of various ethno-religious groups in Nigeria. Cohesion, peace and harmony are fast eluding Nigeria if the current wave of Hate Speeches is not quelled by true leadership capacity. The economic effect of Hate Speech on the country is already gloomy. Many investors have withdrawn their investments from certain parts of the country because of fear of attacks and consequent loss of their business. As it stands now, national unity is already at risk and this has given room for the quest by so many ethnic nationalities demand for creation of countries out of present Nigeria. The speech by the current Nigerian President that five percent of the commonwealth will be invested in the regions that did not vote massively for him during election , while 95% will be invested in regions that voted for him especially his own region has not only worsened national unity since the beginning of the administration of President Muhhamed Buhari but has made so many people lose interest in Nigerian Unity and mutual co-existence.

Conclusion

This paper having labouredd to show how and why hate speech gain momentum, it went ahead to outline the possible consequences of hate speech to the audience; this as outlined should could lead to the formation of hateful emotion towards the targeted groups, and sometimes it can result to real life hostility as can be seen in its devastating effect in Nigeria Socio-economic life since gaining independence from Britain. Efforts have been made to show how individuals can respond to hate speech. To this end, we showed that hate speech can be properly addressed from two perspectives, namely; the perspective of the one making hateful speech, and, from the perspective of the audience. The outcome of these recommendations on how to counter hate speech is that, the state institutions have to strengthen the provision of human rights education in schools. This will include the training of teachers as well as media personalities on how to combat or prevent prejudice and promote mutual understanding and tolerance from one another in all aspects of life. This is aimed ultimately at young people and the media. In developed nations, governments partner with media houses on how to effectively battle against prejudice – hate emotions – and its consequence. Unfortunately, recent technological development has been a great challenge to the task of ensuring freedom of expression and prohibition of hate speech. In furthering the recommendation by this paper is the need for enactment of stringent Hate Speech law that will guarantee 25 years imprisonment of any violators of the laws or any agent of Hate Speech depending of the stipulations of the law. Hence this paper in outlining possible ways to effectively counter hate speech realized that each medium – Facebook,

Tweeter etc – have a way of addressing hate related contents published on their platforms.

Reference

Aðalheiður, J. and Kalenikova P. I. "Hate speech: an overview and recommendations for combating it" *Icelandic Human Rights Center*. http://www.humanrights.is/static/files/Skyrslur/Hatursraeda/hatursraeda-utdrattur.pdf

Bartlett Jamie, & Krasodomski-Jones Alex (2015). Counter-speech: Examining content that challenges extremism online (S. 21). Accessed 1 December 2019. https://www.demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Counter-speech.pdf

Bojarska, K. 2018, "The Dynamics of Hate Speech and Counter Speech in the Social Media: Summary of Scientific Research." Accessed 20 November 2019 https://cihr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-dynamics-of-hate-speech-and-counter-speech-in-the-social-media_English-1.pdf

Brown A. 2017 "What is Hate Speech? Part 1: The Myth of Hate" *Law and Philosophy*, Vol. 34 No. 4, DOI 10.1007/s10982-017-9297-1.

Fyfe, S. 2017, Tracking Hate Speech Acts as Incitement to Genocide in International Criminal Law. *Leiden Journal of International Law*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 523–548. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156516000753

United Nation, 2019, "Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech." Accessed 1 December 2019,https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf

Weston-Scheuber, K. 2012 'Gender and the Prohibition of Hate Speech', *Queensland University of Technology Law and Justice Journal* Vol.12 pp.132–150.