

A Study of Online Hate Speeches: Legitimation Processes by Nigerian Political Actors

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Abstract

Online social media offers platforms for political gladiators to engage in hate speeches as a means to perpetual power contestation. This in turn demands total restructuring of political institutions, through different legitimation strategies. The current study highlights hate speeches' legitimation process and its entrenchment as a contemporary societal cultural object. The paper extends Vaara's et al (2006) and Johnson's (2006) application of the theory of legitimacy in products marketing to the evaluation of political hate speeches' legitimation process. Data comprising of twenty-five (25) excerpts on hate speeches from Politically Exposed Persons across Nigeria were purposively selected from online media sources. The study revealed that any particular hate speech of political gladiators is a cultural product marketed by the elites through the legitimisation processes of innovation, local validation, diffusion and general validation with its negative influence on Nigeria's political institutionalisation processes.

Key Terms: Evaluation, Discourse, Hate Speeches, Ideology, Context

1.0 Introduction

Language, like a two-edged sword, is capable of engendering peace or violence depending on the disposition of its users. War had been

ignited and peace entrenched among nations depending on language choices by political actors. The preponderance of violence and terror in contemporary Nigeria, with its fluid nation-status, is largely attributable to hate speech. Conscious that hate speech and violence are intertwined with a relationship of cause and effect, the nexus between hate speech and the restructuring of political institution through legitimation strategies is highlighted in this study.

The corpus of what constitutes hate speech appears elastic as submissions by scholars on its scope are largely descriptive rather than definitive. The nature of language which amounts to hate varies from one clime to the other depending on contextual socio-cultural experience. Hate speech in the literature is largely seen as any verbal or written derogatory appellations or pronouncements directed at individual or group on the basis of gender, religious, political, racial, or affiliation. This study adopts The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2013:4) which describes hate speech to cover:

- (a) all dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, by whatever means; (b) incitement to hatred, contempt or discrimination against members of a group on grounds of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin; (c) threats or incitement to violence against persons or groups on the grounds in (b) above; (d) expression of insults, ridicule or slander of persons or groups or justification of hatred, contempt or discrimination on the grounds in (b) above, when it clearly amounts to incitement to hatred or discrimination; (e) participation in organizations and activities which

promote and incite racial
discrimination.

(b)

2.0 Background of the Study

Online social media offers several platforms for elites and political gladiators to de/market government policies, depending on whether they are in or out of government. Political contestations often lead to the use of inflammable speech and a resultant violence, thereby exacerbating the fragile peace in Nigeria. Often times, gullible Nigerians key into self-serving agenda and help the political class in taking hate speech to its current unprecedented heights. In the process, hate speech and violence becomes the norm and the new cultural object that shapes the society and its institutions.

The intensity of hate-induced violence in Nigeria has resulted in a good number of Nigerians losing their lives to sectarian violence. At the root of these is the struggle for power aided by the platforms provided by both traditional and digital media. The liberalisation of the cyberspace has given more Nigerians Internet access, aided freedom of speech and, regrettably, the intensity of the production of hate. Political gladiators, in particular, take advantage of the uncensored cyberspace which has become a point of convergence to most Nigerians to spread the language of hate as well as legitimise the scourge.

This is made possible as suggested by Habermas (1977:259) because “language is ...a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power. In so far as the legitimations of power relations, ...are not articulated, ...language is also ideological”. Online platforms have become the theatre of power struggle with the resultant legitimization of hate speech. Legitimation is an effective method of making things accepted and widely known within the society. Hence, discursive legitimization strategies are methods of activating specific discourses to create a sense of legitimacy or illegitimacy (Fairclough, 2003).

This study highlights the process of legitimization of hate speech and its entrenchment as a societal cultural object. The objective is to highlight the discursive legitimization strategies that are employed to legitimize hate speech as part of the process of institutionalisation. The choice of online texts is to emphasise the significant role of the social media in the complex process leading to legitimization and to bring to fore the danger that a liberal digital media portends for the peace and unity of Nigeria.

3.0 Statement of the Problem

Online media, in providing platform for socio-linguistic interactions, are susceptible to abuse and hate propagation. Hate speech is ideological and characterised by justification, legitimization or de-legitimation of government policies depending on whose side of the political divide the actor is. The question then arises as to what the motivations for political hate speech are? What is the legitimization process of hate speech that results in its institutionalisation? How does hate speech, like a commodity, displace the existing order? What is the nexus between hate speech, norms, value and culture? These are some of the questions at the heart of this research.

4.0 The Concept of Legitimacy

This study is hinged on the theory of legitimacy as adapted from its application in marketing and the competitive business organisations (e.g. Lavrusha, 2013 and Goessens, 2015). Legitimation theory is germane to this study considering that hate speech is deployed by political gladiators as part of the strategies for having political edge. Competition for political space requires similar strategies that are often employed by competing firms in marketing. New commodities are legitimized as the promoters often de-market/de-legitimize the existing commodities. This is also applicable in politics where gladiators constantly contest for space partly through hate speech. The theory of legitimacy is, consequently, extended to the evaluation of political hate speech which is a cultural object in Nigeria.

The masses often have to accept the ideologies of hatespeech since its promoters have access to the media and huge resources for its legitimation. Nnamdi Eruchalu (2017) has therefore averred that the ability to deploy the ideological properties of language to sway the people and manipulate their mind is a sure way to achieving success in the political domain. Widdowson (2007) followed suit in enthusing that "... all communication, to a greater or lesser extent, is an exercise in control, an attempt to assert one's own position and to persuade the other to accept it. When somebody says, or writes something, it is with the intention of getting the addressee, the second ... party to think or feel or act in a certain way....".

Ideology and legitimation are at play when political actors take advantage of the social situation and subjectively reconstruct context and the interpretations of the social situation. Vaara et al (2006:793) enthuses that legitimacy is "a discursively created sense of acceptance in specific discourses or orders of discourse". Political discourse, like other forms of discourse, outlines what is legitimate or otherwise. Hence, hate speech is being marketed and worn with the garb of legitimacy which has made Nigerians to accept it, more or less as the new political culture.

In its strict political sense, Sternberger (1968) sees legitimacy 'as the right to rule and the recognition by the ruled of that right'. Its definition by Suchman (1995:574) as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of a nonentity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" appears more comprehensive and germane to this study. Legitimation is mutually related to institutionalisation, the process by which institutions are produced and reproduced (Phillipsetal.,2004). Institutions have a great influential power, which shapes the behaviour of its actors and *vice versa*. Legitimacy confers on the institution "a set of constitutive beliefs" (Suchman, 1995:576) which are aftermath of socio-cultural process, the sum of which are prerequisites to institutionalisation.

Legitimation is a socially constructed process, which links institutions to a broadly accepted cultural framework of beliefs, rules and values (Johnson et al., 2006). From the perspective of legitimacy, hate speech as a social object creation defines “what is becomes what is right” (Johnson et al., 2006: 57). In the process of constructing new social objects, the existing reality may be delegitimised using hate speech or offensive language. Johnson (2006) has categorised the legitimation process as innovation, local validation, diffusion and general validation. Goessens’ (2015) summary reveals the connectedness of this process:

Firstly, in order to satisfy a certain objective, need or purpose, a social innovation is established. Secondly, the innovation is approved by relatively few local actors and linked to a broadly accepted system of norms and beliefs. Next, after the local confirmation, the diffusion of new social object within a field occurs. The final step of the legitimization results in the general acceptance of the innovation.

From Johnson’s (2006) averment and the connection between the legitimation of specific issues, the wider social practices and the influence of the social-political actors, the implications of hate speech on the socio-political well-being of Nigeria can be put in the right perspectives. The notion of hate speech “sheds light on the strong tie between legitimation practices and current political obstacles occurring within a social context” (Vaara and Tienari, 2008). Being a cultural resource, discourses are highly important from the political perspective (Hardy et al., 2000). It exposes “various and often on-going socio-political struggles for legitimation, delegitimation, and re-legitimation in different social arenas, such as the media” (Vaara et al. 2006). Opposition, as part of power contestation, may seek moral legitimacy. The content of the course determines what is legitimate or otherwise.

With this approach, not only legitimation but also the process of legitimation can be found out (Vaara,2006).As attested to by Such man (1995:576) ,“legitimacy is purposive, calculated and frequently oppositional” while group legitimacy is pragmatic, moral and cognitive”. Moral legitimacy is“ primarily build upon the self-interest of an actor”. This being the case, hate speech are oppositional tools that are often deployed for political contestations and the preservation of group interest.

4.1 Hate Speech in Political Discourse

The manifestations of hate speech with ethnic, religious and political colourations have in recent times attracted the attention of scholars. Bakircioglu (2008) and Shaw (2012), in examining hate speech in cyberspace, bemoaned the human rights abuses that are involved.Bakircioglu (2008) in acknowledging the cause and effect relationship between hate speech and violence cautioned that legislation against hate speech should not harm the freedom of expression.St. Clare (2018),in turn, investigated how hate speech functions and the modalities for reclaiming hate utterances through “value reversal” and “linguistic disarmament” as means for neutralising hate speech which were admittedly an onerous task.

Rasaq, Udende, Ibrahim and Oba (2017), Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesomi and Okorie (2017), Okafor and Alabi (2017) and Ezeibe (2016) all concentrated on hate speech and politics. Ezeibe (2016) and Okafor and Alabi (2017) examined the role of the media in propagating hate within the context of the 2015 elections in Nigeria. They accused the media of stoking the flame of hatred and stimulating political motivated violence. Joel (2013) also averred thatin a diverse society like Nigeria, several offensive exchanges, online and on-street, are rooted in hate speech produced by public officials and the academia. The study further revealed that hate speech is accompanied by violent acts, owing to what he called the degree of intolerance, in Northern Nigeria which is subtle and ideological in the south.

Notwithstanding the useful insights on hate speech, the literature does not establish hate speech as a cultural commodity and its influence in the on-going societal institutionalisation process as are being orchestrated through certain legitimation strategies. In establishing this link, this paper evaluates political hate speech not only as part of the power contestation strategies and the preservation of class interest; it presents hate speech as an attempt at re-creating a social order for the society and its institutions.

5.0 Methodology

Most Nigerian political actors have produced hate speech at one time or the other. Notable politicians including Reno Omokri, Femi Fani-Kayode, T.Y. Danjuma, Asari Dokubo and Muhammadu Buhari, Adams Oshiomole, Mallam Nasri El-Rufai, among other high profile political gladiators, have engaged in political outbursts which smack of hate and motivation for violence. The data for this study were randomly excerpted ethno-socio-political hate speeches across Nigeria's political divides by actors whose identities are concealed for ethical purposes.

6.0 Presentation of Data and Analysis

Hate speech is a cultural product marketed by the elites through the legitimisation process of innovation, local validation, diffusion and generalization, thereby negatively influencing the on-going political institutionalisation process. The discussion that follows is structured along this process.

6.1 Hate Speech as Elitist Political Innovation

Johnson (2006) has argued that the need to satisfy certain objectives, needs or purposes, is a motivation for social innovation. In the context of political contestations, therefore, innovation implies a movement away from the norm in the achievement of political aspirations. Hate speech is a new innovation which is devised to alter the Nigerian political landscape and *status quo*. Threats, labelling and name calling are some of the new innovations in the Nigerian political legitimisation process.

1. We need to break down infidels, practitioners of democracy and constitutionalism, voodoo and those that are doing western education in which they are practicing paganism.
2. If there are fisticuffs in Yola arising from super imposition of infidel leader on Students Union, I wont bulge if it escalates to full-fledged bloodbath.
3. I was disgusted with Buhari’s Democracy Day speech. It was filled with lies, deceit, propaganda, false narratives, questionable assertions, fake facts and figures and Goebbelian mendacity and falsehood.
4. When you described him as a “drunken sailor”, a “drunken fisherman”, a kindergarten President and insulted members of his family it was not described as hate speech. When you called us “wailing wailers” it was not hate speech. When they called us PDPigs, it was not described as hate speech.
5. All APC supporters are Boko Haram members, they are the real terrorists, Chukwubiana will expose them all.

Name-calling, labelling and threats have attained new heights in Nigeria’s political discourse. Linguistic items such as “infidels”, “drunken sailor”, “drunken fisherman”, “wailing wailers”, and so on in examples 1 - 5 are derogatory names. Related to name calling is labelling. This is clearly the case with Examples 1, 3 and 5.

... practitioners of democracy and constitutionalism, voodoo and those that are doing western education in which they are practicing paganism.

I was disgusted with Buhari’s Democracy Day speech. It was filled with lies, deceit, propaganda, false narratives, questionable assertions, fake facts and figures and Goebbelian mendacity and falsehood.

All APC supporters are Boko Haram members, they are the real terrorists, Chukwubiana will expose them all.

In each of these examples is strong ideological labelling which are novel to struggle for power. Example 1 for instance is hinged on the ideology which seems to whip up religious sentiments to which most Nigerians are strongly attached. It delegitimises the current office holders in its subtle elevation of one religion over the other. While Example 3 questions the integrity of the current office holders, Example 5 is more oppositional as it labels a particular party and their members as belonging to the outlawed ideological quasi-religious Boko Haram terrorist group.

Issuance of threats in political discourse is as well innovative. Threats are issued to coerce or arm-twist the target to act in a pre-determined manner. In Example 2, for instance, fire and brimstone was threatened should there be an “imposition” of a particular individual as the leader of Students Union.

If there are fisticuffs in Yola arising from super imposition of infidel leader on Students Union, I won't bulge if it escalates to full-fledged bloodbath.

The threat in this example is smaller in magnitude compared to that made by a contestant for the highest office in Nigeria that:

Baboons and monkeys will be soaked in blood should the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria, is rigged.

There is also the threat of ideologically “breaking down” of the “infidels”, a veiled reference to political office holders who do not share the same faith with the aggressor.

We need to break down infidels, practitioners of democracy and constitutionalism, voodoo and those that are doing western education in which they are practicing paganism.

Hate speech, in the form of name calling, labelling and threats as part of the legitimising process are innovative ways of achieving the desired political objectives.

6.2 Hate Speech and Local Validation

The next phase of the legitimisation process is to locally validate the political innovation. At this stage, the product is legitimised within a community or group that shares the closest socio-cultural affinity with the promoter. Language with ideological properties is more often than not enacted with the speaker being sensitive to the group or community of practice. Charity is said to begin from home, hence hate speech is most likely test run and validated at the local level before its elevation to the national stage. It is most likely that hate speech from a group member, say, of Boko Haram aggregates the opinion of the group.

6. Amaechi you fuck up. You no come see as you come carry number one biggest traitor in the South? Kai! I shame for you. I no fit dance for you. You fuck up, well, well. Tufiakwa!
7. The imbecilic Goodluck Jonathan is a disgrace to humanity and deserves to be skinned alive for handing over to a Hausa goat. Buhari is a shameless pédophile and rapist.
8. The cruel Igbo have done and are doing more damage to our collective nationhood than any other ethnic group, being responsible for the first violent interference with democracy in Nigeria, resulting in a prolong counter-productive chain of military dictatorship.
9. We need to break down infidels, practitioners of democracy and constitutionalism, voodoo and those that are doing western education in which they are practicing paganism.
10. If there are fisticuffs in Yola arising from super imposition of infidel leader on Students Union, I wont bulge if it escalates to full-fledged bloodbath.

The expressions of hate in Examples 6-11 has some degree of local validation and were made on behalf of their respective group. For instance, the target of hate, Amaechi, in Example 6 was generally perceived to be running against political current in the Niger Delta in the build up to the 2015 elections by pitching tent with the All Peoples' Congress (APC) against the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). He was perceived as a traitor by an average Niger Deltan who saw his action as threat to the aspiration of Goodluck Jonathan also from that region.

The utterances in Example 7 are legitimised and validated in the community of its producer. It is likely that majority members of the community share similar sentiment against the targets, Goodluck Jonathan and Buhari. While one was being vilified for relinquishing power as an incumbent to the opposition without putting up a fight, the other is seen as taking what rightly or wrongly belongs to the group.

The imbecilic Goodluck Jonathan is a disgrace to humanity and deserves to be skinned alive for handing over to a Hausa goat. Buhari is shameless paedophile and rapist.

The thread of spurning locally validated hate speech runs through Examples 8-10. The hate content in each case indicates the community of practice, the underlying ideologies behind its production as well as implies its local validity. For illustrative purposes, the underlying ideologies in the examples below are ethnic, religious and political with their legitimacy and validity coming from the group which is represented by the speaker.

The cruel Igbo have done and are doing more damage to our collective nationhood than any other ethnic group, being responsible for the first violent interference with democracy in Nigeria, resulting in a prolong counter-productive chain of military dictatorship.

We need to break down infidels, practitioners of democracy and constitutionalism, voodoo and those that are doing western education in which they are practicing paganism.

If there are fisticuffs in Yola arising from super imposition of infidel leader on Students Union, I wont bulge if it escalates to full-fledged bloodbath.

6.3 Diffusion of Hate Speech into the Political Field

Following its innovation and local validity, the next stage of the legitimisation process of hate speech is its diffusion or spread to the political field. At this stage, hate speech is released with precision in execution and timing so it could be effective in meeting the challenge that may be posed by the opposition at any point in time. With the simultaneous enactment of hate speech across ethno-socio-political divides, the Nigerian political atmosphere becomes charged. All forms of hate speech in public domain including were diffused as part of the legitimisation process. Excerpts of inter-ethnic politically motivated hate speech are presented below:

11. Aah! Unamumu o. I don dey believe Charlie Boy wehsay una be really mumulistic people. ah! The man sabi lie. E even say his sickness na unknown sickness. Wetin be unknown sickness? Una no fit answer me? Una be mumu. Una bemumu.
12. We can never be Yoruba allies no matter how hard they try to please or serve us because they are born traitors and infidels.
13. The igbos are also responsible for Nigeria's cultural and moral degeneration with their involvement in all kinds of crimes, including international networking for drug and human trafficking, violent robberies and kidnappings, high-profile prostitution and advanced financial fraud.
14. ... now they're shouting Biafra want to go, Biafra want to..... , why won't they go when *you* think that the north own the own the country ...
15. They got a Boko haram member, before we woke up they said he has escaped. Escaped! And Biafran agitators are still in prison till now, they've not escaped, but Boko Haram member has escaped!

Examples 11-15 are few excerpts of erstwhile local validated hate speech which are in public domain. Hate and offensive language are no longer produced in hushed tones but have at the stage of

diffusion become part of the political discourse aided by the media. There is convergence of hate at the centre arising from its production by every segment of the society; hence public discourse becomes saturated with hate. Whereas Example 11 was uttered by a political actor from the South, Example 12 was a jab from the East targeted at the West which is reminiscent of the alleged roles of the Yorubas led by late Obafemi Awolowo in quelling the Easterners' secession bid during the Nigerian Civil War.

Whereas Example 13 was a verbal tirade directed at the Ibos apparently by their Hausa-Fulani counterparts, Examples 14 and 15 were hate speech made by certain Christian religious leaders. The speech was targeted at the predominant Muslim Northerners in solidarity with the agitation and separatist agenda of the Independent Peoples of Biafra and the perceived high handedness of the authority against the group. Hate outbursts are ideological tools that are used in de-legitimising the opposition. Whereas the hate may have ethnic or religious colourations, the primary purpose of hate diffusion is to create and occupy a political space.

6.4 Hate Speech and General Validation

The negative outcome of legitimisation is that the absurd may become the norm, like lie repeatedly peddled, as the societal existing order falls apart. Overtime, hate speech may gradually gain acceptance and validity by the society and its institutions. Hate speech at the level of general validation as the final stage of the legitimisation process cuts across socio-political divides as every strata of the society comes to terms and perceive abusive language as *sine qua non* for the attainment of political power. A few illustrations would suffice.

16. President Buhari's Independence Day broadcast was full of lies. I will now expose each lie with facts and figures to back up my expositions. I feel sorry for those who say Buhari has 'integrity'Conclusion: I deal in facts. Everything I say is evidenced based. Buhari is a liar. A chronic and consistent liar and to say he has integrity is to insult people of integrity.

17. Ever since President Buhari ... appointed Festus Keyamo as the spokesman for his ... re-election campaign, the latter has acted as if his job was to be the chief alienator for the President. The man is uncouth, abrasive and does not understand the power of words.... Keyamo is a victim of insular thinking. ... Like a character from George Orwell's 1984, Keyamo is so tunnel visioned that he has hypnotised himself to think of reality as false and his fancies as real. As the spokesman for a campaign, you are not meant to be an attack dog. ... It is silly of Festus Keyamo to insult Bishop Oyedepo as someone who endorsed Atiku because of gain.
18. President Buhari may want to caution Keyamo and his media aides. But look at me asking President Buhari to caution his media aides. Has the President not said worse things himself? The more I think about it, asking the President to caution Festus Keyamo on this issue is like asking a dustbin to caution a toilet for its dirty habit.
19. We now know why Kano Governor, Governor Umar Ganduje, likes very big Agbada and babanriga. It is for 'banking' purposes. Farouk Lawan used cap banking, while Ganduje prefers agbada banking. No wonder they fought President Jonathan for introducing the cashless policy. I hear that Ganduje, will launch a mobile banking app called #BabanrigaBanking. ... President Buhari is the chief launcher. EFCC has been ordered not to attend the launch. After all he promised Buhari 5 million votes. So \$5 million bribe is reasonable. \$1 per vote.
20. Many people in Kaduna are now widows, many people are now fatherless, many are orphans because some people think they own power, am I talking to somebody here? Look I didn't want to bother you with pictures, gruesome pictures. They are not things we hear any message when I show them to you.

21. Chief Obasanjo was widely reported to have said ‘God will NEVER forgive me if I support Atiku for President.’ ... we draw attention of all God-fearing Nigerians to a character who would use the name of God in vain and in a flip-flop manner. Where is the shame? Where is the honour? Where is the pride? “When a person invokes the curse of God upon himself if he does a particular thing, like Obasanjo has done, and then deliberately does that particularly thing and calls on Nigerians to follow him to receive his curse, Nigerians must flee in the opposite direction. We urge Nigerians NOT to follow this character to receive the curse he invoked upon himself.”
22. “We also note with interest the full participation of some “men of God” in the entourage of the Peoples’ Democratic Party for this political re-alignment. “We are glad that they have publicly declared their partisan interest and urge all Nigerians to see all their previous, present and future attacks on President Buhari from their pulpits in the context of partisan politics and not in the context of nationalistic or altruistic commitment.

In example 16, the speaker named the President “a chronic and a consistent liar who is lacking in integrity”. Similarly, the linguistic strategy employed in accusing Buhari as hate speech producer is harsh and hateful in itself. While throwing jibes at Keyamo, the speaker admonished Buhari, Keyamo’s principal, to caution his subject from propagating hate against high profile personalities (18). In a u-turn like strategy, the speaker recanted:

President Buhari may want to caution Keyamo and his media aides. But look at me asking President Buhari to caution his media aides. Has the President not said worse things himself? The more I think about it, asking the President to caution Festus Keyamo on this issue is like asking a dustbin to caution a toilet for its dirty habit.

The lexical items “dustbin”, “toilet”, “dirty habit” with which the metaphor of equating Buhari to Keyamo smack of hate speech against Keyamo and the president. Notwithstanding that several reasons were adduced in justifying the hate, the courage to speak about a sitting president in such language is found as well as accommodated only within the current political reality and nobody seems to be perturbed about the choice of language. This is a reinforcement of the acceptance and general validity of hate speech in our contemporary society.

The same speaker, in example 19, had named Umar Ganduje, a sitting Governor and Farouk Lawal, a former high profile legislator, both from Kano State as thieves. Buhari was presented in the corruption scandal as an accomplice. The speech was a fall-out of a widely publicised scandal in which Ganduje on video allegedly collected some huge sums of money in foreign currency. Lawal had suffered similar fate in the recent past when as the Chairman, House Committee on Education, was alleged to have collected huge sums of money from a Nigerian businessman, whose organisation was being probed by a House of Representative Committee, led by Lawal. Hence the jibe:

We now know why Kano Governor, Governor Umar Ganduje, likes very big Agbada and babanriga. It is for ‘banking’ purposes. Farouk Lawan used cap banking, while Ganduje prefers agbada banking. No wonder they fought President Jonathan for introducing the cashless policy. I hear that Ganduje, will launch a mobile banking app called #Babanriga Banking. ... President Buhari is the chief launcher. EFCC has been ordered not to attend the launch. After all he promised Buhari 5 million votes. So \$5 million bribe is reasonable. \$1 per vote.

Whether it is the description of FestusKeyamo, the Campaign Spokesman of President Buhari’s Campaign Organisation as “uncouth, abrasive and does not understand the power of words ... [who]is so tunnel visioned that he has hypnotised himself to think

of reality as false and his fancies as real ” (17) or the insulting words from Keyamo against Obasanjo, where he described the former president as cursed, lacking in shame, honour and pride and the clergies who accompanied Atiku, the opposition PDP presidential candidate to Obasanjo’s residence (21) as partisan and “lacking in altruistic and nationalistic” considerations (22), hate speech seems to have been legitimised as there is little or no challenge to abusive language hurled at highly revered Nigerians who hitherto had enjoyed immunity from such verbal attacks.

The clergies are also not left out of political hate speech which their members have come to accept as legitimate. The excerpts below at the surface look like mere statistics on the orgy of killings particularly in the North, a closer look would however reveal a political snag to it. In attributing the killings to “some people think they own power” and the emphasis that follows, “am I talking to somebody here?”, shows the partisan disposition of the speaker, a clergy whose address was obtained from YouTube in addition to the large audience who were present in church when the utterances were made.

20. Many people in Kaduna are now widows, many people are now fatherless, many are orphans because some people think they own power, am I talking to somebody here? Look I didn’t want to bother you with pictures, gruesome pictures. They are not things we hear any message when I show them to you

The hate in the above example is a veiled reference to a particular ethnic group and faith whose members are adjudged to have arrogated the right to govern Nigeria to their group. The group as represented by the incumbent president is perceived not to have done enough to stop the killings. Some even go as far as holding responsible for the killings and giving tacit support to one ethnic group over the other. The argument in this section is that, hate speech particularly of political colourations has gained national ascendancy as it is embraced more or less as the norm rather than the exception as the instrument

of political contestations by the opposition in particular and to certain degree by the government *in situ*.

7.0 Conclusion

Political hate speech is in this study evaluated as the new social reality which has more or less replaced the existing order in contemporary Nigerian society. This is made possible through a socio-cultural or legitimation process often outlined by political actors as an appropriate model of behaviour. The outcome of such process, one of which is hate speech, is a prerequisite to political institutionalisation. Legitimation process of hate speech in Nigeria consists of a chain of innovation, local validation, diffusion and general validation, thereby negatively influencing the on-going political institutionalisation process. The negative outcome of legitimisation is that the absurd may become the norm as the societal existing order falls apart. Overtime, hate speech has gained acceptance and validity by the society and its institutions. In so doing, violence, killings, arson and all forms of instability in Nigeria have become institutionalised alongside hate speech.

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