

FAKE NEWS & HATE SPEECH: A Colloquium Report

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria, the proverbial giant of Africa, has in recent times, been beset with the politics of paternalism which has translated into heightened consciousness in ethnic nationalism and extremist immoderation, all too manifest in the now very dominant paradigm of *fake news* and *hate speech*. Amidst this threatening state of confusion, the nation-state witnesses its highest level of polarization among the citizenry and records a harvest of kidnappings, abductions, raping and ritual killings, all of which the government blames on fake news and hate speech.

As part of its contribution in the attempt to mitigate and possibly proffer a solution to the twin monsters of fake news and hate speech, the Olusegun Obasanjo Centre for African Studies (OOCAS) at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Abuja organized a one-day Colloquium on *Fake News and Hate Speech*. This report, therefore, is a descriptive analysis that highlights the culture of impunity with which political elites incite and polarize the citizenry, especially on the contentious issues of religion and ethnicity.

The paper applies the critical discourse analysis approach to evaluate the colloquium proceedings - the views, positions and propositions of discussants/participants and the ensuing communiqué that fake news and hate speech are largely products of mainstream and social media; with governments and political elites as the main culprits who exploit the volatile issues of religion, politics and ethnicity to polarize and incite.

The paper concludes with nine communiqué recommendations including, that the mass media, especially the mainstream media, should invest more in the practice of investigative journalism and Nigeria's governments, in general, should provide good governance, equity and justice to the citizenry; that, participants and discussants believe will curb the menace of fake news and hate speech.

Keywords: Nigeria, Politics, Religion, Ethnicity, Fake news & Hate speech

Introduction

In recent times, more than ever before, Nigeria, the proverbial giant of Africa, has diffidently been beset with the politics of paternalism which has translated into heightened

consciousness in ethnic nationalism, extremist immoderation and its associated vices of general lawlessness; all manifest in the now very dominant paradigm of *fake news* – the harbinger of *hate speech*.

Amidst this threatening state of confusion in which the nation-state witnesses its highest level of polarization among the citizenry and records a harvest of kidnappings, abductions and ritual killings, the government puts the blame on fake news and hate speech and promises to punish purveyors of this filth because it is considered a possible plot “to overthrow the government and inciting violence”¹

At the National Assembly, two Senators representing Niger State (Mohammed Sani Musa and Aliyu Sabi) respectively, sponsored a “bill for the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation and Related Matters” and another “for the Establishment of the National Commission for Prohibition of Hate Speech and Related Matters ...” but there were equally sharp reactions from civil society that government promises to punish purveyors of fake news and hate speech is a ploy to clamp down on critical views and dismissing the proposed bills at the Senate as a waste of time and duplication of existing laws.

The Olusegun Obasanjo Centre for African Studies (OOCAS) at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Abuja, at its inception, promised to be an all-embracing and encompassing centre of scientific research with Africa as its longitudinal focus and a goal to generate ideas that will influence public policy. In line with the centre’s mission to function as a hub of intellectual exchange of ideas and vision to conduct problem-driven and policy-relevant academic activities to prime and shape public debate, the centre organized a one-day Colloquium on *Fake News and Hate Speech* on Tuesday, 16th July 2019.

Objectives

The objectives of the colloquium:

1. To conceptualize and situate Fake News and Hate Speech in their proper context;
2. To highlight the challenges posed by fake news and hate speech;
3. To examine the reasons and channels through which fake news and hate speech spread and why they are accepted and believed by the populace;
4. To explore the effects of fake news and hate speech on the society as well as the extent of vulnerability of persons and institutions; and
5. To proffer ideas and solutions towards ending or mitigating the twin monsters of fake news and hate speech.

Facilitators

The immediate past Vice-Chancellor of the National Open University of Nigeria, Prof. Abdalla Uba Adamu, as Chief Host and the founding Director of the Olusegun Obasanjo Centre for African Studies, Prof. Stanley Naribo Ngoa as Host. Other facilitators include the Guest of Honour/Intellectual Mentor to OOCAS, Prof. Eghosa Osaghae, a tenured professor of comparative politics, former Vice-Chancellor of Igbinedion University and the current Director-General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and Mr Dan Agbese, journalist, columnist, author and Editor-in-Chief of *NewswatchNow* magazine as the Master of Ceremony/Moderator.

Resource Persons

The resource persons at the colloquium comprised eminent Nigerians from all walks of life. These included the Keynote Speaker, Mr. Ray Ekpou, a seasoned journalist, political commentator and Chairman/Chief Executive Officer of *NewswatchNow*; the Lead Discussant

was the fiery cleric, Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, a commentator on national issues and Bishop of Sokoto Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria. Other discussants were Prof. Chidi Odinkalu, a constitutional lawyer, former Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission and Senior Team Manager of the Africa Program of Open Society Justice Initiative; Dr. Reuben Abati, a lawyer, journalist, columnist and former Special Adviser on Media to a Nigerian President; Ms Funke Egbemode, President of the Nigerian Guild of Editors and Managing Director of *New Telegraph* newspapers (presently serving as a commissioner in Osun State), Senator Chris Anyanwu, a journalist, publisher, author, politician and Chairman/Chief Executive Officer of *Hot FM* radio station, Abuja; Dr. Nduka Otiono, an Associate Professor at the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Canada; and Dr. Obadiah Mailafia, a development economist, international polymath, central banker, and statesman.

Participants

A total of 126 participants comprised academics, members of the diplomatic corps, chief executives of media organizations and associations, publishers, special advisers on media to top government functionaries, top-brass journalists, and other top-level executives from the public and private sectors of the economy attended the colloquium.

Literature Survey

Fake News: The concept of objectivity and truth - “real news” in the practice of journalism –i.e., verifiable information in the public interest is fading into extinction and lies, call it “fake news” (disinformation, misinformation or even mal-information) are being passed into history.

Welcome to George Orwell’s season of “universal deceit”, where telling the truth is now a “revolutionary act” in which people conveniently foresee the future if and when it agrees or coincides with their wishes, where obvious facts are ignored and unwelcome².

This is “fake news” - a 21st Century global disease called “information disorder”; it undermines the credibility of information by fraudulent manipulation of truth and is usually exploitative in its convention of language usage.

Fake news is orchestrated information that is deliberate in purpose. Indeed, it hardly can be put to the test of the journalistic ethos of “facts” being sacred and “comments” being free; and as such, equally, it hardly deserves the “news” label after the “fake” in its title. Thus, one may not be entirely out of synch to even label the dubious phenomenon as “Trumpism”³ Fake news is a “viral modernity” which Michael Peters et al.⁴ refer to as the “epoch of alternative facts”; Lee McIntyre’s “post-truth” and the Oxford Dictionary’s Word of the Year 2016, even when Al-Radhan argues that the phenomenon is symptomatic not of a year but an era of boundless virtual communication - a landscape consisting of poor journalism, political propaganda and misleading forms of advertising and sponsored content where politics thrives on a repudiation of facts and commonsense⁵.

Thus, alternative truth and post-truth in an information environment contaminate and weakens the rationality of thought because, according to Guy Burger⁶, a particular danger in ‘fake news is that it is usually free to people who lack access to independent public service sources of information – such people are “especially vulnerable to both disinformation and misinformation”.

Burger insists that fake news is hazardous because it is as confusing as it is “frequently organized, well resourced, and reinforced by automated technology”, and as we are all aware,

one notable effect of our “viral modernity” is to function as ‘multipliers & amplifiers’ in the diffusion process. Indeed Guy Burger is not alone in his assessment of our viral modernity; Eric Emerson Schmidt, who for over a decade held sway at *Google Incorporated*, is reputed to have said a number of things as an IT authority, including the one that social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Spaces, Reddit, Tik Tok, Deviant Art and many more, are “amplifiers for idiots and crazy people” even when the IT experts at creation did not intend them to be so.

But perhaps the most temptingly irrefutable one from Schmidt is that the Internet is the largest experiment in anarchy mankind ever had. According to the ex-COO of Google, it is “... the first thing that humanity has built that humanity doesn’t understand” 7, – especially when considering its prismatic role in the diffusion of hate speech quite often with extremist content in misinformation and disinformation.

Fake news’ methods of sophisticated communication strategy and the application of automated technology in pursuit of its deceit and confusion agenda perhaps explain the essence of the Oxford Internet Institute’s Computational Propaganda Project. For about a decade now (since 2012), the Oxford Internet Institute have been investigating (amongst other variables) automated technology and what the investigators refer to as computational propaganda to ascertain the impact of automated scripts and Political bots (the manipulation of public opinion on social media) in political life⁸.

However, worthy of note here is that much as “fake News” is current and has become a dominant paradigm, especially since the year 2016 and Donald Trump’s ascension to the American presidency, fake news as an idea is not new; it has simply acquired a new and technology-enhanced status.

A brief look at the historico-literary origins (assisted by corpora of historical examples) of fake news would etymologize the phenomena of Soviet Russia’s “Dezinformatsiya” 9 – an early 20th-century typology of communist information management that is intended to mislead; an “Orwellian” technique, historically, associated with the characteristics of authoritarian regimes. It represents a psychological form of information manipulation designed to deprive subjects/victims of independent thought patterns but convinced in lies; a possible confirmation of Guy Burger’s... people who lack access to independent public service sources of information and are “especially vulnerable to both disinformation and misinformation”.

The phenomena’s modern-day equivalent would be ‘gas lighting’, where deceptions, inaccurate narratives and events are orchestrated, so much so that victims are not only exposed to falsehood but also begin to doubt their own judgment of perceptions and, ultimately, the reality which has become the isolated fact in a convincing contextual setting¹⁰. One fact of contemporary media, according to Dornan¹¹, is that reality has become so plastic in the 21st century because the technologies that made it so also compromised the anchors of traditional sources of authenticity; adding that confidence, in reality, is eroded “when what one ... is led to believe comes from a welter of competing and contradictory accounts”.

Hate Speech

On the other hand, America's long history of hate speech legislation clearly demonstrates that hate speech, like its forerunner – fake news - is not new and has simply transformed from its original label of "racial ridicule" to "group libel" and then finally, to the present "hate speech." Kibler¹² confirms that hate speech, whose venues shifted from theatres

and movie houses to colleges and universities, had been an early 20th Century phenomenon set in the rivalry between the American political values of parity and freedom of expression.

Thus hate speech is any communication that is intended to insult, offend, intimidate and even express prejudice against a person, group, or people based on religion, sexual orientation, nationality, race, or even disability. Indeed, fake news is the harbinger of hate speech as fake news is biased and discriminatory in content and narratives targeted at members of certain groups such as migrants, refugees and even religious sects with the intent to lacerate.

For example, in South Africa, the prevalent cases of xenophobic attacks against migratory peoples owe their origin to the circulation of derogatory rhetoric in fake news, including that of "immigrants" being responsible for the high rate of unemployment of native South Africans and the increase in inner-city crime; both of which arguably promote hate crime and its attendant violence.

Hate speech, therefore, refers to communication or information intended to mislead – that is -information designed to cause or even create the wrong impression about someone or something and carries with it the potential for 'multipliers & amplifiers' in the diffusion process. Communication is as manipulatively confusing as it contaminates the information environment; the information typology that perfunctorily weakens rationality in thought fraudulent and threateningly dangerous.

According to the Council of Europe, as confirmed by the European Foundation for South Asian Studies (efsas), hate speech, therefore, refers to "all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin" 13.

Welcome to our world of *information heteroplasia*, where normal information cells are replaced by abnormal information cells that instigate and incite hate, violence and even war.

Rationale/Justification

Indeed, hate speech is communication or information intended to brutalize, demean, be cruel, and derogatory. Amongst the many amobarbital effects of hate speech is 'hate crime.' For example, the '*hate speech and its resultant 'hate crime' targeted Muslims after the terrorist attack (that took over 3000 lives) on the twin towers of New York City's World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.* Levin & McDevitt¹⁴ confirm that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) records indicate evidence of more hate crimes targeted at Muslims following the immediate thirty days after the 9/11 attack; compared to the period between 1997 and 2001.

In Nigeria, the country's demographic mix and cultural diversity ordinarily ought to be a source of strength and unifying factor. Still, the West African giant's different tribes and tongues have left her with a society as volatile as she is culturally diverse. From pre-independence days, Nigeria had always had to contend with her differentia in language, tribe, religion, and culture, sometimes severely bruised in that process but always managed to come out stronger and determined to forge ahead as people with a common destiny. But, the country never had it as bad as it has in recent times; especially since the return to electoral politics and perhaps mainly, from the Good luck Jonathan presidency years and, if Nigerians thought that with the pejorative and discriminative jibe - by agents of antagonism - aimed daily at president Jonathan and that administration, they'd seen it all, there is more to come.

Nigeria's sitting president, Muhammadu Buhari, a retired Major General of the Nigerian Army and a beneficiary of the December 1983 military putsch that sent packing the democratically elected Government of the Shehu Shagari led National Party of Nigeria (NPN), ran for the office of the President of the federal republic three times (in 2003, 2007, and 2011 respectively) through the democratic electoral process without success. He, however, won on his fourth attempt in the 2015 general election as an opposition party candidate on the platform of the All Progressives Congress, A.P.C. – commonly noted then as a hurried congregation of strange political bedfellows with the sole purpose of getting Jonathan and the PDP out of power.

Not too long after the 2011 general election won by Good luck Jonathan of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), then opposition candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change (C.P.C.) was alleged to have warned that: "God willing, by 2015, something will happen. They either conduct a free and fair election or go a very disgraceful way. If what happened in 2011 (alleged rigging) should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood"¹⁵. The fireworks seem to have begun as presidential spokesman - Dr. Reuben Abati - responded peremptorily: "we find it very sad that an elder statesman who once presided over Nigeria can reduce himself to a regional leader who speaks for only a part of Nigeria" ¹⁶.

Buhari's comment – call it threatening or inciting -, symbolic as the "... dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood" may sound, worthy of note here, though, is the fact that on election day 2011, the blood of a number of young and promising National Youth Service Corps volunteers was shed in the Kano metropolis where Mr. Buhari enjoys a cult-like following of the electorate.

Politico-religious and ethnic bigotry took centre stage on the hate speech tripod of anger, hate and fear. Then enters group-based hatred; Halperin et al.' s¹⁷ most essential antecedents of political intolerance and other tendentious threats of destruction followed. Lawal Kaita, who served as governor of old Kaduna State for about three months (October – December) in 1983, in March of 2012 thundered: "A Northerner must become President in 2015 or Nigeria will divide. We hear rumours all over that Jonathan is planning to contest in 2015. Well, the north will be prepared if the country remains one. That is, if the country remains one, we are going to fight for it. If not, everybody can go his way".

Asari Dokubo, leader of a Niger Delta militant group (the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force), though perhaps it was too early to respond, so he took his time then fired back: "There will be no peace, not only in the Niger Delta but everywhere if Good luck Jonathan is not president by 2015, except God takes his life, which we do not pray for" ¹⁸. All this happened amid Bokoharam's declaration of a caliphate in the northeastern flank of the country. Then, as a run-up to the 2015 general election, the inciting story or threat of the "... Dog and the Baboon" being "soaked in blood" all of a sudden came into tendency again, and, on Election Day 2015, President Jonathan, even before the full declaration of poll results by the umpire – Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) -, congratulated General Muhammadu Buhari as the winner of the presidential election.

Arguably, with the exception of the annulled June 12, 1993, presidential elections generally adjudged to have been the freest and fairest of elections in the history of Nigeria's democratic experiments, most of the country's electoral experience had been exercises in

decadence. And, if the political temperature of Nigeria in 2015 was at a boiling point, then that of 2019 and its accompanying drums of war was a climaxing crescendo.

Life in Nigeria just before the 2019 presidential elections had become meaningless and worthless for many a citizen, and the issues are so many to enumerate but suffice to say that the wanton wastage of human life was so rampant in frequency that the country's former President, himself a retired general of the army and known for his proficiency in writing open letters to sitting heads of Government, wrote to President Buhari advising the Government to take immediate measures to deescalate violence in the country or face the risk of a "Rwandan-style genocide" in Nigeria¹⁹.

Nigeria's north-central region is known as the food basket of the country. It remains an influential constituency in times of elections because of its character as a melting pot for both the Muslim north and the Christian south and thus a significant swing territory; but, the region is now more recognized and reputed as the theater of legendary sectarian clashes between farmers and Fulani herdsmen; clashes that had left many dead and even more homeless.

According to a February 2019 *World Watch Monitor report*²⁰, the use of dangerous rhetoric and religious polarization has contributed to the escalation of conflict between Fulani herdsmen and Christian farmers in the region, adding that violence attributed to Fulani herdsmen or militants is believed to have been responsible for the deaths of about 60,000 people since 2001 – a figure estimated to have wasted more lives than the terrorist Boko Haram had taken. The report observes that an attack by herder militia happens so frequently that characterizing such attacks and clashes as "local disputes over land and cattle" is insufficient, highlighting that "prominent Nigerian religious and political leaders" continue to use polarizing rhetoric to amplify fear and suggestively, fuelling more violence. Could this possibly explain the impunity in the frequency of the attacks?

Dugan & Chenoweth²¹ describes it as *the embodiment hypothesis*, which predicts that increases "in violent hate crimes against certain populations are triggered by government elites who signal supremacy over those groups, emboldening some members of the dominant group to commit violent acts. Within the context of intergroup power, we interpret explicit anti-group acts by the Government as signals to some members of the dominant group that they can combat the perceived threat of minority power growth without consequence. In other words, some may perceive that the Government is giving them a license to act on their anger".

But whereas the herder militants and farmers conflict in the middle belt of Nigeria is often attributed to matters over land and cattle, the root and branch intersecting polarization of the country are far much more complex issues of youth unemployment, political discrimination that has heightened a new sense of nationalism, ethnic and religion fuelled tensions and violence. Interestingly, the Fulani herdsmen are said to be allegedly culpable for all things bad, to the extent that the man who lost his wallet in public transport blames the Fulani herdsman for his missing wallet. Such was the state of the nation as the OOCAS colloquium held.

Analysis of the Colloquium Discourse

The keynote speaker and veteran journalist Ray Ekpu, in his opening speech, jokingly puffed up the filled assembly when he declared happiness that "a common reporter" had been invited to give a keynote speech where there is a coterie of eminent scholars and academics. "I am lucky to be invited to come and take in the rarefied air of the academia and rub minds and shoulders with the egg-heads of the Academy." Still, despite the inflated ego that this atmosphere may invest in him free of charge, he said he knows his place as a "reporter" and so

will not, in "my address" and remarks, pretend to be an academic; and true to type, he sank his claws into the "opposite" subject of fake news and hated speech as authoritative as he came.

He blamed government officials and parliamentarians who, by their various statements in recent times, elevated fake news and hate speech to a level worthy of public conversation, adding that fake news, also known as junk news or pseudo-news - a type of yellow journalism has been so thoroughly corrupted, "bastardized and vulgarized that its real meaning is lost in the miasma of political kick-boxing" and fake news as an expression of falsity is given a shot in the arm by the growing incidence of fakery all around.

"Look at them," he points, "fake drugs, jollof rice, tires, designer bags, perfumes, clothes, beddings, policemen, election results, soldiers, journalists, age, certificates, pregnancies, boobs, buttocks, pastors. So the idea of fakery is universal, but to me, fake news as used today is very elastic, so elastic that it is misleading if the statement conveys the concept of false information. The world has been inundated with incorrect information from ancient times, but we can mention a few cases in the not-too-distant past that most of us here might remember. In 1981, a journalist called Janet Cooke was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for a story she wrote and was published by the Washington Post. The story was about an eight-year-old heroin addict named Jimmy. It was a riveting story full of pathos. After a lengthy interrogation, Ms. Cooke admitted that she fabricated the story. It had no shred of fact. In May 1983, Stern, a German weekly, had published what was said to be Adolf Hitler's diary. The magazine also sold it to the British Sunday Times for 250 000 pounds. Still, before Sunday Times could publish it after massive promotion, the German Government declared that the sample it had tested was counterfeit. Mr. Henri Nannen, the publisher of Stern magazine, apologized to the public and stopped the serialization of Hitler's fake diaries purportedly written. President George Bush had told the American people several times that the President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and Bush used that as a justification for waging war on Iraq. When the American soldiers overran Iraq, they found no weapons of mass destruction, but President Bush concocted the big lie for regime change in Iraq. Their President's vigorous falsehood dissemination shortchanged the Americans. During the 2008 presidential campaign in the U.S., there were publications in the American media sponsored by political opponents that Mr. Barack Obama was not born in America. He had to produce his birth certificate, which proved that he was born in the United States.

In Nigeria, the President of the country, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, was actually declared dead by some news media several years before he actually died on May 11, 1996. This was before the onset of social media. Some prominent Nigerians have been declared dead in the online media in more recent times. People like Professor Wole Soyinka and Chief Ernest Shonekan, the Head of the country's Interim Government, have been flippantly murdered on the internet. Each time I see such obituary announcements made by online activists, I just check with three or four media platforms of respectable mainstream media before I drop my doubt. A few years ago, the Chairman of the Nigerian Press Council, Alhaji Alade Odunewu, had assigned me to investigate something for him. He said that Olusegun Obasanjo had complained to him that a news magazine, *The Source*, had published a full-length interview in a question and answer format purportedly granted by him but that he never granted any such interview to anybody. I spoke to the magazine's publisher, Ms. Comfort Obi, who did an investigation that revealed that the interview was an absolute fabrication. But perhaps in the history of fake news in Nigeria, nothing beats, whether in terms of sensation or ludicrousness or wackiness, the story

of President Muhammadu Buhari's alleged death and the emergence of his alleged double. The story, which was published on several online media platforms, is that Buhari had died in April 2018, but the cabals in the villa recruited one Jibril Sudani from Sudan to pretend to be Buhari. The internet was agog and even some educated people believed the hoax. You can say that this was political demonization of the President that shouldn't have happened, but the possibilities for fraud in the internet age are almost limitless. Most of the examples I have listed so far are largely from the mainstream media, so you can see that the publication of false information did not emanate from the online media. The online media have merely upped the ante using Facebook and other online platforms... In World News Daily Report, there was a story titled 'Baby sitter transported to the hospital after inserting a baby in her vagina.' This story has generated more than 1.2 million shares, reactions, and comments. Some of the other high selling hoaxes were crime stories such as 'Popeye's manager arrested for allegedly dipping chicken in cocaine-based flour to increase big sales, Hendersonville man caught molesting pig after his penis gets stuck, Angry woman cuts off man's penis for not making eye contact during sex, F.B.I. seizes over 3000 penises during a raid at morgue employee's home'. This one generated more than 1.1 million engagements. Sex is a subject that often creates interest, so you can see why fakers are obsessed with it".

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Ekpu declared that "Online" media had liberalized access to information, expanded the sources of information available to the public, and provided relevance to the "Office of the Citizen." For him, fake news published by either digital or mainstream media can lead to hate speech, especially on volatile issues such as religion, politics, and ethnicity. Hate speech, in turn, can lead to violence, discrimination, or hostility. In his words: "fake news and hate speech have been fingered for the Asaba massacre of August 1967 and the Rwanda genocide of 1994,"; concluding that "while those who ply their trade in the social media as purveyors of information are providing platforms for some of the voiceless people in this country, I suggest that we christen what they do citizen conversation or citizen communication. They are citizens but not citizen journalists".

Reacting to Mr. Ekpu's classy presentation, the lead discussant and very erudite Bishop of the Sokoto Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria, Dr. Matthew Hassan Kukah, noted that fake news had become such an attractive concept as a result of information deficit. He argued that on its own, disinformation is a legitimate tool of war and as such, Nigerians "have to be very careful" because most genocides experienced in history are often preceded by hate speech. Bishop Kukah warned against the blanket demonization of herdsmen, especially the Fulani stock, as such "... could be a preamble to a breakout of violent confrontation" Reacting to the fake news of the picture of a Fulani herdsman adorning pages of the Nigerian International passport booklet, the Catholic priest intimated that he almost fell for the fake news until he got a copy of the passport himself. Displaying pages of his passport as proof that the travel document is well represented by all Nigerians and not only a picture of the herdsman, he said: "when I look at my passport, it has the coat of arm and map of Nigeria. Then right in front of the data page where all my information is. I am not a Bini man, but I am eminently proud of this. I didn't even know it was here because I had to go through the passport page by page". He continued: "when I opened the passport, I saw Zuma Rock, then I saw TIV dancers. Who permitted them to put TIV dancers? Then I got to the next page before I came to this poor Fulani man standing with his cows. Suddenly, this is the only thing we have chosen. Why is it exciting? It is exciting because this is the time for us to 'hate,' literally tag every Fulani as a

herdsman. We are on a dangerous precipice," he said. Likening the labelling and ethnic profiling of the Fulani to the experience of the Igbo of old Eastern Nigeria and the subsequent three years (1967-197) long civil war, the cleric quipped: "... it is Fulani today, yesterday it was the Igbos"; concluding, "... those who lead us should better ... tell us where we are going,"²²

Prof. Chidi Odinkalu, a constitutional lawyer, former Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission and Senior Team Manager of the Africa Program of Open Society Justice Initiative, reacted to both the keynote speech and that of the lead discussant – Bishop Kukah – by hinging his discussion on the tripod of "fake news and power, political economy of fake news and fake news and the 'big' lie."

Odinkalu is of the opinion that "we" should be talking about the "fragility of the country" and not citizens or journalists who are purveyors of fake news. "Government," he said, are the worst offenders as purveyors of fake news and hate speech. Specifically naming names, the constitutional lawyer gave the example of how a sitting governor in one of the northern states deliberately spread the dangerous "news" that sixty-six Fulani people were massacred "at a location in Kaduna."

The discussant said that the governor knew "he lied," and the security agents sent to "arrest me also knew he lied,"; asking: What do we do when the Government put out falsehood? Professor Odinkalu, who accused political elites of a particular hue, explained that fake news and hate speech thrive because "they" deliberately "weaponize" illiteracy and, in that order, "ignorance and poverty."

Although W.E.B. (William Edward Burghardt) Du Bois, an early twentieth-century American black protest leader and one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), is reputed to have warned that it is dangerous to limit free speech while equally cautioning that civilizations would not endure in expression without some form of limitations, Obadiah Mailafia, a former deputy governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria is more concerned about Government's interest in wanting to curb the menace of fake news and hate speech. "Our problem is insecurity and not fake news and hate speech" because, for him, the hate-speech campaign is as ominous and as hypocritical as Idi Amin's prevarications about free speech. The former Ugandan dictator is credited with saying that he believed in free speech but could not possibly guarantee anybody's freedom after the speech. Mailafia thinks that the fake news/hate-speech campaign ultimately is "a war against our collective liberties and an assault on the right to free speech as guaranteed in our constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948".

The development economist who wondered "why now?" explained that fake news and hate speech had always been a dominant part of public discourse but that since the Tunisian Arab Spring of 2011 and recently Khartoum in Sudan, the power in the instrumentation of social media to mobilize opinion and influence political outcomes has become a source of worry; especially, to people in positions of authority. In his words: "Many authorities have become ever warier of the social media and its power. They seem to believe that one way to muzzle its influence is through the hate-speech campaign".

Dr. Reuben Abati, a lawyer, journalist, columnist, and former Special Adviser on Media to a Nigerian President; Ms. Funke Egbemode, President of the Nigerian Guild of Editors and Managing Director of *New Telegraph* newspapers (presently serving as a commissioner in Osun State), Senator Chris Anyanwu, a journalist, publisher, author, politician and

Chairman/Chief Executive Officer of *Hot FM* radio station, Abuja; and Dr. Nduka Otiono, Associate Professor at the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Canada all somewhat agrees with the positions of Odinkalu, but they are more in alliance with Ekpu, the keynote speaker that the practice of journalism had received a thorough whipping in the hands of the perpetrators of fake news.

Dr. Abati agrees with Professor Odinkalu that leaders (as in Government) are part of the problem of fake news. He observes that "when leaders break the rules, the people will not trust them," which perhaps explains the reason for people's preference for the fake news model of information. Still, while he is unhappy with the "fake" in the news and "hate" in the speech, pondering over "how do we solve this problem?", Abati also sees a funny side to fake news and its practitioners. "They are now called influencers and even media giants. Some now live in Banana Island too" – an opulent abode of the rich in the highbrow Ikoyi, Lagos neighborhood. And whereas Dr. Otiono laments that fake news is current because "watch dogs" have become "lap dogs" that rely on news from government houses, Funke Egbemode, like Ray Ekpu, insists that there are "no citizen engineers, no citizen pharmacists and no citizen doctors; therefore, there can be no citizen journalists."

However, Senator Chris Anyanwu believes that fake news thrives partly due to bad journalism, where the journalistic norm of investigative reports, rich features, and stringent fact-checking are no more in existence. Ironically, she says cable and online platforms like *Premium Times* fill this void in Journalism. Anyanwu says that bringing sanity to the polluted information ecosystem will require a process of self-healing to restore the credibility and respect of journalism practice in Nigeria.

According to the discussant, "it is time to raise the bar on ethics," and for the above to happen, there must be "stringent fact-checking of both information and sources, particularly when a story originates from an unreliable online source"; and, the culture of "brown envelope" which has caused mainstream media a credibility deficit must stop.

Conclusions

At the end of deliberations, participants made the following observations:

- Fake news is the dishonest, deliberate fabrication of information to hurt a person or organization socially or politically or make some financial gains through increased patronage.
- On the other hand, hate speech is a communication intended to insult, offend, demean, intimidate, and even express prejudice against a person or group based on religion, gender, nationality, race, or disability.
- Fake news and hate speech are essentially products of the mainstream media and social media. However, social media users are primarily the promoters of fake news and hate speech. "getting it first is better than getting it right for social media users."
- The primary sources of fake news and hate speech are governments.
- Fake news published either by digital or mainstream media, especially on volatile issues such as religion, politics, and ethnicity, leads to hate speech. In contrast, the critical ingredients of hate speech are incitement to hatred, victimization, hostility, injustice, violence, or discrimination.
- Factors that enhance the spread of fake news and hate speech in Nigeria are mobile phones, Internet penetration, colossal youth population, poverty, and lack of trust in the system.
- Fake news and hate speech are tools of psychological warfare that can lead to disastrous consequences such as the fragmentation of society and other violent outcomes.

- The main drivers of fake news and hate speech are religion, politics, and ethnicity in Nigeria.
- The huge information deficit in Nigeria promotes fake news and hate speech.
- Fake news and hate speech are multi-dimensional and so they should be treated from all angles - political, theological, sociological, psychological, economic, etc.
- Fake news and hate speech thrive under the atmosphere of injustice and bad governance.

Consequently, participants also recommend the follows:

1. It is not enough to condemn fake news and hate speech; all citizens must take action to halt their spread by using legal means.
2. Each citizen must become a gatekeeper and strive to expose the dangers of fake news and hate speech.
3. The government at all levels in Nigeria should evolve and promote national values among all Nigerians.
4. The mass media should invest more in the practice of investigative journalism.
5. Mass media practitioners should strengthen their investigative capacities in order to counter the spread of fake news and hate speech.
6. Nigerian mainstream mass media should wake up and face the realities of their profession.
7. The government at all levels in Nigeria should invest in education so as to reduce illiteracy and increase citizen awareness.
8. Leaders should strive to evolve a peaceful and just society where people will see fake news and hate speech as mere rumours and discard them.
9. Governments at all levels in Nigeria should always strive to provide good governance and justice to the citizens so as to curb the spread of fake news and hate speech.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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