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## MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND POWER RELATIONS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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**SECTION 4:**  
MEDIA, ETHICS AND  
CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS



# MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND POWER RELATIONS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

*Toyosi Olugbenga Samson OWOLABI*



## **Introduction**

**T**he concept of multiculturalism as it relates to Nigeria and other African countries is of critical importance in the analysis of power relations, national integration and the overall development of the nation before, during and in the postcolonial era. The character of the nationalist movement which eventually lost its initial vibrancy and sense of unity of purpose to factional and divisive pressures, which were fueled and strengthened by the emergence of separatist and ethnic campaigners have their roots in the intrusion of ethnic identification and religious affiliation into African polity.

Over the years, diverse ethnic groups have been living together peacefully despite socio-cultural diversity. In Nigeria, before and immediately after independence, different ethnic groupings both major and minor have dwelled together without any suspicion and distrust. Multiculturalism started wearing a negative and aggressive posture characterized by hostility and conflict when new elements such as socio-economic, religious and political competitions, leading to fear of hegemony and unhealthy power play began to creep into

the relationship. Nigeria as a multicultural nation is characterized by diversity, heterogeneity and pluralism of cultures, orientations, ethnic origins, religious affiliation, ideological posture, patterns of thinking, communicative styles, political leaning, socio-economic development and geographical locations (Albert, 2002; Takwa, 2017).

Ideally, the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of the country ought not to constitute a challenge to a harmonious and peaceful relationship. Multiculturalism in Nigeria as exemplified during the pre-colonial era was advantageous in that each ethnic group lived and developed together without conflict and ethnic hegemony of one over the other. This corroborates the assertion that there is unity in diversity. Even during the colonial era and the early post-independence era, the multiethnic setting of the country could be perceived as beneficial, especially concerning the competitive tendencies, socio-economic development and political consciousness of each ethnic group that constitutes the nation (Owolabi and Tijani-Adenle, 2022).

Like the two sides of a coin, the multiculturalism nature of a country can become detrimental when, according to Pate and Oso (2017), diversities and competitive tendencies are poorly managed as the situation has been since 1966 when the first military coup was staged in Nigeria. The mismanagement of Nigeria's ethnic diversity has led to ethnic suspicion, hatred and outright conflict. In the present circumstance in Nigeria, the mass media are central to the power relations among the ethnic groups. The media occupy a central position in discussing political, social, economic and other governance issues, leading to the process of decision-making, opinion formation and behavioural disposition in the society. Therefore, the centrality of information to governance confers on the mass media the responsibility of determining the identity, style of operation, and contents, which are capable of manipulating the desires, actions and inactions of the reading, listening and viewing audiences (Takwa, 2017).

In the manner of a monopolistic market where the consumers are at the mercy of the marketers, "authoritative diffusion of information places the public at the beck and call of the source" as epitomized in the authoritarian and communist-soviet press theories (Mustapha, Ahmad and Abubakar 2014, p.115). Although the media system as it is in Nigeria's present democratic milieu appears to operate with a measure of objectivity that guarantees accuracy, fairness and balance, some communication scholars still believe the media are not free from bias at the individual, professional, organization and ideological levels as they gather, process and disseminate information to the public (Baran and Davis, 2010). This paper, therefore, investigates the normative and pragmatic inter-activity of the media and the power relations among the multi-ethnic components that constitute Nigeria. This will be examined given the nature of media ownership and control in Nigeria.

### **Media Ownership, Power Relations and Multiculturalism in Perspective**

Mass media are perceived as a wide variety of printed, electronic as well as new forms of communication apparatuses that are used in communicating information and exchange of ideas with the intent to engender an understanding of events in a heterogeneous society. The media are expected to serve as the custodians of common values and the protector of communal interests, as well as watch over the governance of the state to the extent that no segment or a portion of it exercises undue power over the others (McNair, 2009). Unfortunately, this role of the media in society has been significantly compromised due to the ownership structure of many media outfits.

It is noteworthy that the mass media system in any nation cannot be discussed without examining media ownership trends, which over the years, have constituted a hindrance to the media's ability to objectively carry out its statutory roles. Media ownership, according to Rauf (2003, p.49), "is the autonomy of an individual or group over a mass medium". This means an individual, individuals or group of people who own and fund a medium of mass communication can determine and influence how it is managed through the selection of staff, the welfare of staff, the commercialization of news and the editorial focus and orientation. Media ownership according to Gans (1979) cited in Adejola and Bello (2014) usually have either commercial or political interest or both at variance with the ethical principles of journalism practice. Against that background, media owners often resort to influencing directly or indirectly the editorial process and news contents of their medium to protect their various interests. In other instances, the media owners may have religious and/or ethnic affiliations that may necessitate compelling their reporters and editors to give full coverage to the group at the expense of others.

While asserting that media owners interfere with what is published or aired in the media and by extension what becomes public knowledge, Rauf (2003, p.50) classifies media ownership into four groups. These are government ownership, private ownership, corporate ownership and political party ownership. In another classification, Warren (2007) identifies seven forms of media ownership, which include international corporations, national corporations, small organisations, government, community, individual and non-profit organisations. Notwithstanding the diverse ownership forms mentioned above, media ownership in Nigeria is categorized into three: federal government-owned, state government and privately-owned media. It is important to note that by their allegiances to the idea and ideals of their owners, media are found to contribute to the mismanagement of power relations that have caused ethnic suspicion and hostilities among the constituent ethnic groups that make up the nation.

### **Power Relations**

The concept of "power" seems to be widespread, but in scholarly circles especially in the social sciences, it is a word that is highly ambiguous with more connotation than the real meaning. Power is central to politics just as money is pivotal to economics and commerce (NOUN 2013). Power is a central ingredient in both national and international politics. Power determines the relative influence of actors in the political system, as well as shapes the structure of the system itself. This explains why "politics has been described by political scientists as the struggle for power." Power is without doubt the most crucial of all concepts in the political process. The concept of power has been described in relational and material terms. The relational definition formulated by Dahl (1957, p.3) sees power as an "ability to make an individual or a group do something it would not otherwise do." The material definition sees power as "capabilities or resources, mainly military with which states can influence one another." (p.3). At the most general level, power means, the ability to get the outcome one wants. However, there are several ways to affect the behaviour of others. You can coerce them with threats; you can induce them with payments; or you can attract and co-opt them to do what you want, and you can apply violence against the other.

If politics has to do with struggling for state power, it, therefore, connotes that individuals or groups saddled with exercising power can use the power to attract favour to self and to as many as may be favourably disposed to them. Power in power relations can also be used to oppress others. This is why Qin (2018) defines power relations as relationships in which

one person has social formative power over another and is able to get the other person to do what he wishes whether by compelling obedience or in some less compulsive and even in a more subtle way.

### **Concept of Multiculturalism**

The concept of multiculturalism can be described as plurality, diversity and variety of culture, people and multiple identities, all of which manifest in customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking and language. According to Takwa (2017), one of the colonial legacies bequeathed to Africa is the emergence of 54 independent countries with diverse ethnic and cultural configurations. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation with over 400 ethnic groups, about 250 languages and about 5000 dialects, 36 federating states, 3 major religions, and 18 political parties all operating based on diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political interests to protect (United Nations, 2020). A sense of ethnic affiliation and cultural variability is not inherently a threat to harmonious inter-ethnic relations as can be seen in the long-established mutual relationships among the different ethnic groups since its amalgamation in 1914 despite obvious socio-cultural differences. Multiculturalism and ethnic consciousness in Nigeria began to assume negative features shortly before her independence in 1960 (Omu, 2008). Then, political and socio-economic competition and hegemonic tendency were observed to be creeping into the relationship thus, leading to power struggles, inequalities and conflicts among the three most prominent ethnic groups: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani, which rivalry coloured the direction of the political and constitutional development of Nigeria. This configuration was needed to manage the situation if the nation will progress and its political ship will not capsize.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the social responsibility theory propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1963. The social responsibility theory which we now celebrate as the defining platform for the practice of journalism arose out of dissatisfaction with an earlier normative ideal, the libertarian theory. The commercialization of the press as a result of unanticipated technological developments in the media industry had priced the media out of the reach of common individuals and groups and concentrated it in the hands of few businessmen and political elites most of who had the resources to establish and run media empire and monopolise its usage (McQuail, (2005).

While explaining the basic principles of the theory, McQuail, (1983, p.121) cited in Anaeto *et al.*, (2008) encapsulates thus:

Media must be socially responsible to the public; the responsibility must be based on truth, accuracy, objectivity and fairness, media must be self-regulating, it must not promote violence and civil disorder, the press must be pluralistic in giving equal voice to diverse groups represented in the society, where the media become irresponsible, the society's interference can be justified to ensure public good; and although journalists must be accountable to their employers notwithstanding, they have superior loyalty to the public (p.57)

Going by the above basic tenets, the media as a social institution and media workers as professionals occupy a privileged position and enjoy certain freedom which demands that they must be socially responsible to the public. In other words, social responsibility theory

expects the media to serve the 'public interests' in whichever way it is defined. To serve the 'public interest', the media are expected to maintain a high professional and ethical standard of practice through objectivity, fairness, balance and truthfulness in news coverage and reporting. However, the normative assumptions that the media serve the public and its appointed representatives as a watchdog, participate in public discourse and advocate for the common good on behalf of the public have been called to question. This is because of the media's linkage to the political and economic structure of the society, which has made them become a critical actor in the nation's power relations. Under this condition, the media are observed to be unable to impartially serve the public interest as expected.

### **Managing Power Relations in Multicultural Nigeria: Matters Arising**

Successive governments, military, pseudo-civilian and democratically elected have attempted to manage the nation's ethnic diversity by engendering national integration. This they did by wishing away socio-cultural differences and imposing unitarianism despite the obvious complex cultural diversity. Unfortunately, the more unity they sought to create, the more discord and conflicts they created (Edewor, Aluko and Folarin, 2014).

The rising ethnic divide and suspicion that evolved gave birth to the consciousness of 'tribalism,' and 'nationalism' which have become recurring issues in Nigerian politics. The post-independence regional structure, North, East, and West, that served as the political base for engendering national cohesion and integration thus gave way to the creation of twelve states by the military government that came to power after the three-year civil war between 1967 and 1970. Thereafter, there was the birth of minority ethnic agitations manifested in the creation of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Survival of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MOSSOB), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Odua People's Congress (O.P.C.), and the Arewa Consultative Forum (A.C.F.). All these are later signs that Nigeria had cast off her "unity in diversity" toga and adorned herself in the garment of tribalism and ethnoreligious consciousness.

According to Danaan (2017, p. 76), in all the six geopolitical zones in which Nigeria is divided, there is no obvious distinction between the "natives" and "settlers" and between "Christians" and "Muslims" with one group attempting to monopolise privileges at the expense of others. This is despite the constitutional guarantee that every Nigerian, regardless of ethnic origin and religious affiliation is entitled to the same rights and privileges (The Constitution, 1999, section 15 (3) (b)). The South East geo-political zone, which is predominantly populated by the Igbo ethnic group has alleged the politics of exclusivity and unequal treatment against Nigeria. According to the group, it is only the south-east zone that has never produced the president of Nigeria since democratic government was restored in 1999. The south-south geo-political zones, which constitute the resource base of the country have also alleged that the north-east and north-west which contribute little to the nation's internally generated revenue (IGR) have been taking too much to themselves because they have always been at the receiving end of power play (Osimerah, & Okolo, 2017).

An attempt by the government to manage the dichotomy and lopsidedness in the sharing of state resources and power such that no part of the country (majority or minority) will be at a disadvantage explains why the government established some affirmative policies. These include the power rotation, federal character principles, quota systems, and catchment

areas established to provide opportunities for educationally disadvantaged areas to acquire education, participate in governance and attract development to each group (Joshua *et al.*, 2014). However, it has been observed that there are controversies over how these affirmative action policies are discriminatorily implemented, thus motivating mediocrity, and suspicion, and encouraging ethnic partisanship (Akinwale, 2014). Uneven treatment of citizens based on ethnicity has become a common feature of political leadership in Nigeria. Also, different measurements are used to allocate state resources and distribute opportunities among the diverse ethnic groups thus, breeding agitation and controversy among the constituent groups. These practices are particularly more prevalent in the education and employment sectors where the Southern states are believed to be advantaged over the North.

According to Ugohand Ukpere (2012), the government's efforts to resolve cases of inequalities in Nigeria and allay fears of domination through affirmative policies have been faulted on the ground that outdated data gathered about four decades ago are still being used to allocate resources, and as a means of determining access to education, infrastructure, employment, and inclusion in government, which are believed to lead to injustice and policy abuse. According to Ogwo (2022), there has been wide condemnation of the disparity that characterized the federal government's endorsement of inequality in the cut-off marks for admission into the country's 110 unity schools. For instance, candidates from Abia State were required to score 130, Anambra State -139, Delta State -131, Enugu State -134, Imo State -138, Lagos State -133, and Ogun State -131. And candidates from Kebbi State were given -2 and 20, Taraba -3 and 11, Yobe -2 and 27, and Zamfara State -4 and 2 for males and females respectively.

As a follow-up to that, the reality of ethnic and religious affiliation and consciousness has become a bargaining chip among the political class. For instance, when a presidential candidate emerges from one faith (e.g., Christianity) the running mate automatically must be selected from another faith (e.g., Islam). Also, when a presidential candidate emerges from the North, for example, the running mate naturally must come from the South. This unwritten rule is what has brought about the issue of Muslim/Christian or Christian/Muslim political controversy. At no other time has this calculation played out than in the just concluded general elections in Nigeria. Not keeping to this unwritten rule by the two leading political parties has become an underlying factor responsible for the internal rancour tearing the membership apart. This in part has also defined the outcome of the just concluded presidential elections (Anaughe, 2023). It also explains the mutual suspicions that usually characterized the interaction among people of the various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria.

Although, it has been argued by some people especially the northern political leaders that religious consideration as well as zoning of power among the three levels of government are not entrenched in the 1999 constitution but an imposition of the military regime of Gen. Sanni Abacha. However, the protagonists of the policy were quick to add that, "the entire 1999 constitution was also an imposition which we have lived with though subject to serial amendment" (Vanguard, 2021). In politics, either local or international, the disproportionate distributions of power and national resources or changes to those distributions have been observed to be the fundamental causes of conflicts and unstable political systems. For instance, since after the civil war and the country's return to participatory democracy in 2009, the presidency of Nigeria has not been zoned to the



southeast of Nigeria. Each time politicians of Igbo extraction are always schemed out of the primary election by members of the ruling class.

According to ICIR's (2021) investigation, the top appointment into the country's security service by President Buhari since 2015 is lopsided in favour of officers from the northern part of the country. Figure 1 below illustrates this claim.

## Heads of Security Agencies and their State of origin

Heads of Institution/Agency	Agency	State of Origin	Region
Leo Iborbor	Defence	Delta State	South
Ibrahim Attahiru	Nigerian Army	Kaduna State	North
Isiaka Oladayo Amao	Nigerian Air Force	Osun State	South
Awwal Zubairu Gambo	Nigerian Navy	Kano State	North
Usman Alkali Baba	Nigeria Police Force	Yobe State	North
Yusuf Magaji Bichi	Department of State Security	Kano State	North
Ahmed Rufai Abubakar	National Intelligence Agency	Katsina State	North
John Mrabure	Nigeria Correctional Service	Delta State	South
Muhammed Babandede	Nigeria Immigration Service	Jigawa State	North
Hameed Ibrahim Ali	Nigeria Customs Service	Bauchi State	North
Ahmed Abubakar Audi	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps	Nasarawa State	North
Boboye O Oyeyemi	Federal Road Safety Commission	Kwara State	North
Dr. Liman Alhaji Ibrahim	Federal Fire Service	Niger State	North
Abdulrasheed Bawa	EFCC	Kebbi State	North
Bolaji Owasanoye	ICPC	Ondo State	South
Buba Marwa	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency	Adamawa State	North

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Figure 1: Heads of Security Agencies and their State of Origin as of April 6, 2021.

The above table shows that Nigeria is not running an inclusive government in the last eight years. No wonder, when a security council meeting is held, apart from one or two nominal people in attendance, the entire decision makers there are all from a section of the country. This explains why Nigeria's unity is so fragile and partly this may be the reason why it has been difficult to tackle the security challenges confronting the country.

Another investigation that beamed a searchlight into Buhari's appointments into the top management of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and its subsidiaries also reveals an uneven geographical spread of senior appointments. An analysis carried out by **the ICIR** revealed that out of 40 senior management positions within the NNPC ranging from chief operating officers and managing directors of its subsidiaries to general managers' roles in the corporation, 24 are occupied by Nigerians from the North while those from the South where oil is being explored head 16.

According to Castells (2009), "power relations have always existed in every society where a social actor is to influence disproportionately the decisions of other social actors in ways that favour the empowered actors' will, interests, and values" (p.10). The social actors, in

this case, include the ruling elites, which cut across every regional, ethnic, political and religious group. Others are the media (prints and electronics) and the masses. The power struggle always occurs between the elites of each group with the media and the masses becoming hostages in the power game. It is therefore not surprising to note that the combined issues of religion, ethnicity, and corruption in government are often being used to capture and retain power. In many instances, it can be more detrimental to some and may be favourable to others.

Power relations also exist at the institutional levels, the three arms of government executive, legislative and judiciary contend for power (Salawu 2010). According to Fagbadebo and Francis (2016,), “the principle of separation of powers and the doctrines of checks and balances are two major mechanisms that define power relations among the three arms of government within the three-tier governance structure.” (p.1). These institutional control measures are meant to avert disproportionate use of power and to engender good governance. Nevertheless, it has been observed that as a result of the unequal distribution of power among the three arms, the executive power towers above the other arms thus, the implementation of checks and balances is hindered at the federal, state and local government levels. This, according to Onabajo (2014), accounts for why there is always a fierce inter-ethnic struggle for executive power among the political elites in different ethnic groups and clans that constitute Nigeria thus, also leading to a governance crisis and abuse of state power.

In the advent of any social or economic challenge in the country, citizens are often quick to blame one another rather than addressing their common problem, which is the ruling elites (Onifade, 2015). For instance, Christians blame Muslims for the Boko Haram insurgency by accusing them of attempting to Islamize Nigeria through Boko Haram. Muslims on the other hand claim that Boko Haram has killed more Muslims than Christians, therefore, they see Boko Haram as a tool of political terrorism used by the Christians to decimate the Muslim population so that the president can always be their member. While this altercation continues, the ruling elites regardless of their political leaning, ethnic affiliation and religious persuasion will continue to share state power and allocate public resources to themselves. It is an irony to witness situations when a member of the ruling class is accused of embezzlement, those who share the same ethnicity or religious belief as the accused would organise themselves to defend the corrupt acts while those from other ethnic or religious groups would continue to castigate the government official without seeking full information on the issue. Often, these scenarios have led to a series of conflicts, which the ruling class do maximise for political gains. It is therefore not surprising that “about 40% of conflicts in Nigeria are ethno-religion -based.” (Salawu, 2010, p. 345).

### **Interplay of Media Ownership and Power Relations in a Multicultural Setting**

In every multicultural society, it is common to find each ethnic group soliciting media support and to find expression to compete for equal representation in the national polity. Besides the lateral struggle for political influence among the political and economic elites in Nigeria, there are also the vertical and multi-dimensional aspects of the power struggle in the polity. This exists among some social collective actors (groups and institutions) which include; political organizations, political parties, public organizations, pressure groups, and terrorist organizations (McNair, 1995). These groups compete with one another for space in the mass media in their quests to get the attention and sympathy of the public.

The media as a 'marketplace of ideas' where all available voices are expressed must demonstrate some levels of diversity and pluralism. As the 'fourth estate of the realm', the media are expected to serve as the custodians of common values and protectors of public interest, watching over the operations of the society such that no segment exercise undue power over others (McNair, 2009). This is in line with an assumption of the Social Responsibility theory which says the media should reflect its society's plurality, by giving equal access to various points of view and granting both majority and minority groups the right to reply (McQuail, 1987).

It is noteworthy, however, that there is a growing concern about the ownership structure and influence especially when reporting power relations. Apart from government influence, media ownership in Nigeria is also skewed along ethnic, religious, political and business lines. The Nigerian mass media have mixed ownerships ranging from the Federal government, states and private individuals. While the governments fund their media and use it to project their policies and programmes to the people, the privately owned media on the other hand are funded and run as purely commercial ventures with profit motive and social responsibility to the society. According to Akpesiri and Friday (2008), privatization and commercialization removed the control of information from the government and transfer it to the business class, which incidentally portends greater danger through the private sector monopoly of information. Against this backdrop, a pertinent question is, to what extent has the media carried out its statutory role and how are the media roles perceived among the diverse ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria?

In most African countries particularly Nigeria, media ownership has continued to play an influential role in the editorial policies of media organisations, especially in government media. The government has continuously used the state-owned media to crush the voice of the opposition. Governments over the years have used these media to their advantage during presidential election campaigns across the continent, especially if the government in power is contesting. It is so bad in some media organisations that the ethics of journalism are exchanged with the opinions and decisions of the proprietors of the organization (Ali, 2015). Government-owned media in Africa have been a propaganda tool in the hands of incumbent governments to deceive the citizens about projects they have failed to accomplish after several years in power (Anaeto and Anaeto, 2010).

It is noteworthy that to enjoy continuous peaceful coexistence in a multicultural and multiethnic society such as Nigeria, there must be tolerance based on understanding among the political actors. This is where the media become pertinent as an objective and impartial arbiter. This also explains why each group compete with one another for space in the mass media in their quests to get the attention and sympathy of the public.

However, Croteau and Hoyne (2001) contend that there is an uncomfortable alliance between the media owners of big media conglomerates and the members of the political class, which raises pertinent questions about the ability of the media to arbitrate impartially in the public sphere. Baran and Davis (2010) capture the media and political elites' relationships thus:

Media enable the dominant social elite to create and maintain their power. Media provide the elites with convenient, subtle, yet highly effective means of promoting worldviews favourable to their interests. Media can be viewed as a public arena in which cultural

battles are fought and a dominant or hegemonic culture is promoted (p.34).

The assertion by Baran *et al* (2010) suggests a dilution of the role of the media as an impartial arbiter in society's diverse and conflicting interests as well as its role as a watchdog of the governance system. The connection of the media with the economic and political powerhouse has cast doubt on its ability to effectively and objectively carry out its role, particularly in a multicultural society like Nigeria. Earlier, Herman and Chomsky (2002) remarked that the inability of the media to pragmatically function as an impartial mediator in the contentious public sphere can be linked to their form of ownership and orientation.

Adejola and Bello (2014) note that aside from other limiting factors, media ownership is a major factor contributing to subjectivity in media practice. To be objective, journalists require that they report events without undue interference from media proprietors or any other stakeholder. Media owners, as a result of their commercial and/or political interests that are opposed to journalistic principles, usually influence editors' news judgment such that their other interests (ethnic and religious) will be protected. It is at this point of news selection that the editor's interests usually clash with the owners. Whenever there is power play among the ethnic groups that constitute the society, each actor in the power play usually expects a certain degree of support from the media. In Nigeria, the issue of ownership influence is a frequent one in media discourse because it bears on both management and practice (Aina 2002).

Contributing further to ownership discourse, Adejola and Bello (2017) emphasize that the likelihood of journalists being objective in reporting power relations in a multicultural setting as Nigeria is significantly affected by ownership-induced issues such as "hindered press freedom, poor condition of service for journalists, gratification received from news sources, the wave of commercialization, the ethnic and religious affiliation of the owner, preservation and protection of media owners' political and economic interests." (p.109). Therefore, whether government-owned or privately owned, the ownership influence and control of the media have been a critical issue in journalism practice in general and specifically in a multicultural setting. The ownership pattern in Nigeria has been dominated by 'economics and politics' (the rich and the political elites) who are determined to deploy the media power into furthering wealth accumulation and sustenance of power hegemony. The government-owned media in particular have been classified as the ruling political party's propaganda machine.

Given the above situation, it has been observed that ethnocentrism backed by the media without objectivity breeds mutual suspicion and erodes mutual understanding and cooperation that are required to foster national integration, unity and national development among the constituent groups. The outcome is that when a constituent group in a country is supported by the media to protect and strengthen ethnic agenda at the expense of other groups, they deny the country the opportunity to develop at its optimal capacity (Abdulkadir, 2011, p. 2). No doubt, objectivity is a critical and fundamental canon of journalism but media ownership and power relations have turned to a ruse in a multicultural setting intermingled with politics and religion.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has discussed some conceptual and theoretical issues which underpinned the concerns and the issues concerning the interplay of media ownership and power play in a multicultural setting such as Nigeria. A critical study of the future of media ownership vis-a-vis power play in a multicultural nation such as Nigeria and the controversies around it makes it easy for communication scholars to assert that it is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored.

The study assumes that the interplay of media ownership with a power play in a multicultural setting has become a major complication in the course of media effective arbitration to engender unity and progress. The ethnic diversity in the configuration of the Nigerian society which ought to be a unique selling point for the nation to attain its potential has become a burden as each tribal and religious group wants to dominate and enjoy the commonwealth of the country at the expense of others.

This study has also discovered that the media in Nigeria are not only biased but their performance has been overwhelmed by political, economic and profit motives of their owners. It is, therefore, not surprising to note that professionalism, ethics, national patriotism and unity of purpose that used to be the canon of the Nigerian press before independence had given way to ethnoreligious and proprietorial parochial interests. Although the successive governments have tried to manage the ethnoreligious and political plurality of the country, they have failed to achieve the desired goal of national cohesion and development because the government applied interventionist policies such as federal character, catchment area and quota systems and rotational principles most times, were disproportionately implemented to favour certain group at the expense of others.

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