

English Premiership Fandom: Globalisation and National Identity in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the effects of globalised football on national identity in Nigeria by analysing the various ways through which reception and consumption of European football competitions inflame in Nigerians an alternative nationalism that does not just fetter local production but, as well, undermines the possibility of constructing a Nigerian identity through football. It, particularly, focuses on how the structures of globalisation, in this case the very successful English Premiership clubs, are variously exploited by Nigerians for local identity formation and popular mobilisation, and the consequences such portends for nationalism and national identity. It argues that it is the destructive effect of globalisation on a prospective medium of national identity, which national football and the domestic league constitute, and not the absence of a common ground for identity formation that hinders Nigeria's aspiration for a shared heritage, national integration, and critical citizenship.

Introduction

In Nigeria, there is hardly any other moment when the borders of ethnicity and religion are blurred than when the country's national teams are engaged in international football competitions. Successive Nigerian governments are aware of the bonding role, which football plays among the population and have consistently invested more resources in it than they do for other sports. For the government, the game, apart from bonding the numerous ethnic groups in the country, has also helped in taking youths

off the streets and enhancing international prestige of Nigeria. However, with the advent of cable television, which made possible the live transmission of matches from any part of the world, many Nigerians have shifted attention to European football clubs and competitions, which were popularly perceived as being of better quality than the domestic football league. It became common for many Nigerians, especially the younger population, to identify with top European clubs such as Arsenal, Barcelona, Chelsea, Manchester

United or Real Madrid, among others as fans, and, as well, form alliances along these foreign clubsides that have since developed into social categories employed for social and popular mobilisation. Ironically, while European club football constitutes a public arena for the expression of regional and national identities in Europe (King, 2000: 420), the consumption of same in Nigeria appears to have directed attention away from the domestic football league and national teams with deleterious implications for economic sustainability of football in Nigeria and the uniting role it plays.

Considering that the effects of globalisation might be explored in the context of sovereignty and the sanctity of the nation-state (Sassen, 1996; Goldman, 2007; Agnew, 2009), an important question for investigation is whether, with football globalisation, Nigeria has not lost the opportunity to consolidate on her status as a nation-state or, rather, if the diminution of her social and cultural boundary through global media has not compromised her particularity. How does acquisition of English Premiership clubs' "citizenship" or "identity" by many Nigerians weaken national football or the Nigerian league as platforms for promoting nationalism? Or, does identity with the English Premiership clubs occur without an impact on loyalty to Nigeria as a nation-state? In other words, how is alternative nationalism implicated in Nigerians' patronage of the English Premiership? This article addresses these questions by examining the English Premiership as a form of "supranational identity" that has impacted negatively on the prospects of constructing a national identity in Nigeria through football. The primary data reported here are derived from observation of a church fundraising event, participant

observation and oral interviews were conducted among English Premiership fans at selected television viewing centres in Ibadan, Nigeria.

This article is divided into five parts. Following the introduction, I examine the possibilities football offers for national integration and other existing arguments on the challenges involved in using football for constructing national identity. The next section provides ethnographic insight into English Premiership clubs' identity among Nigerians. After that I put forward a set of explanations on the different ways in which an alternative nationalism is implicated in the culture of soccer fandom. In the concluding section, I represent soccer fandom as an outcome of globalisation and then raise a number of questions bordering on the implications of globalisation for the development of Third World countries, including Nigeria.

Football and National Citizenship

The extensive use of Pidgin English in Nigeria and other common cultural values as well as material cultural items like the mortar and pestle, and musical instruments are often said to indicate the possibility of a Nigerian culture and by implication a national identity (Derefaka, 2004). But none of these has proved to have a capacity to unite the numerous ethnic groups in Nigeria the manner football does. For many people, football is more than a pastime, and the national team, the Super Eagles, is a veritable statement of what it means to be Nigerian. Interestingly, only a few grown-up males will readily accept they never played football at one level or the other and the feelings of being knowledgeable about the essentials of the game constantly provokes sentimental reactions whenever a national team falters. But

beyond the excitement that goes with watching a match either on the TV or live at the stadium is the impact the game exerts on Nigerians, the emotion it extracts from them and the meanings, which every football encounter generates in their heart.

In Nigeria, political appointments, and employments into federal civil service, military, and judiciary are often made to reflect federal character, and not a few people would expend time scrutinising the list of appointments or employment to ensure their ethnic groups are adequately represented. This, however, is not often so with football. Nigerians, most times, will not pore over the national team list to check for the Hausa quota or the ethnic affiliation of the team's captain but will certainly express concerns about a player whose football ability is in doubt. The primary objective of overcoming an externality is just too pressing as to allow for a consideration of the team's ethnic composition. The players while on the pitch are Nigerians and it would not matter where they come from! Such is the uniting power of football among Nigerians and its capacity to blur the border of ethnic identity even when the euphoria, for most times, may be short-lived.

The idea of football as a medium of national expression dates to the early days of Nigeria's independence. Darby (2002: 37), for instance, cited Sylvanus Williams, a former Nigeria's minister of sport in the 1980s as suggesting that sporting achievements not only help to integrate people but are also a measure of a nation's greatness. This, of course, becomes pertinent in view of how football experience, especially the gold medal won in the male football event of the 1996 Olympics, has helped the image of Nigeria at the global level

and instilled a sense of pride in citizens. With international football, the prospect of "conquering" another nation that occupies a higher socio-political and economic pedestal becomes a sort of "psychic income" (Crompton, 2004), which bolsters the self-esteem of nationals of developing countries, and makes them situate their country at a realm of global achievement which transcends that of countries popularly acclaimed as super powers. Thus, across the world, success in sports, generally, brings about national pride in citizens, and as well unite people at least temporarily (Marschik 1998; Johnes, 2000; Lopes, 2007).

During its most successful periods in the 1980s till the mid 1990s, the Super Eagles appeared in seven African Cup of Nations finals, winning in 1980 and 1994. The national team also played for the first time in the finals of the FIFA World Cup in 1994 and qualified for the second round in a group that included Diego Maradona inspired Argentina, Bulgaria, and Greece. These finals were essential moments for affirmation of the Nigerian identity, as they provided opportunities for espousing sentiments of solidarity both on and off the football pitch, and within and outside Nigeria, and showing the entire world what the country could offer in terms of soccer prowess. The construction of a collective identity made possible by an experience of a common foe that must be defeated also allowed for a process of imagining a national community. The Super Eagles, therefore, exists as a representation of an aspiring nation, a mark of national possibility, a symbol of a struggle to achieve international recognition and respect, and above all, a suggestion of the power of football in forging a national identity.

Nigerians are quite aware of the uniting role, which football plays, and as Chimamanda Adichie (2010) opines, the idea of an “us”, a collective identity, becomes unquestionable whenever the national team files out against an opponent. Adichie further reliving her experience of watching the final of the soccer event of 1996 Olympics between Nigeria and Argentina in an article published in the 11 June 2010 issue of *The Guardian* stated as follows:

The shrill pee-pee-pee whistle went off. We had won gold . . . We hugged neighbours we did not like. We offered drinks and relived the game over and over. From the streets came the sounds of car horns, of shouting, of singing. What happened that night was an explosion of nationalism of a certain kind, a benign, forgiving, optimistic nationalism (Adichie, 2010: np).

Creating a sense of “we-ness” among Nigerians, many would agree has proved to be no easy task, as “other-ness” is a realism that manifests in the daily lives and activities of the people. “Our,” in the country, mostly applies to ethnic membership and the “other” is usually not a foreign citizen but a national with a different ethnic affiliation. In a broader perspective, “we” as employed by Adichie transcends national membership offered in legalistic form to incorporate a kind of primordialism, an intrinsic sense of belonging, and a shared brotherhood, all of which are absent in the everyday interaction with the national space. The “we-ness” of football further embodies the very rare spirit of affinity, mutuality, and collectivism that are needed to transform Nigeria from being an aggregate of nationalities to a nation. In other words, the “we” engendered by football achievement demonstrates not only the capacity of different ethnic nationalities for integration, but also a

common aspiration and the recognition of the role of unity in a re-engineering process that would, supposedly, lead to further achievements in other areas of national endeavours.

A number of scholars, however, have criticised the idea of national identity being mediated through football, arguing that football nationalism is not only restrictive but also temporary (Bairner, 1996; Houlihan, 1997; Murray, 2009; Laksana-Tambuna, 2011). Laksana-Tambuna, for example, while describing football nationalism in Indonesia as pseudo-nationalism, argues that equating the mass euphoria that accompanies the success of a national team with nationalism is to suggest that nationalism strive for nothing more than the need for a common enemy that should be despised. In his opinion, apart from the fact that the euphoria is often short-lived, the constant need of a form of “common enemy” to unite a country like Indonesians is perhaps an indication that the people can never be united without it. But such form of pessimism as expressed above, which may also apply to Nigeria since people tend to withdraw into their ethnic cocoon not long after a match involving the national team has been played, appears misplaced considering that the feeling, the emotion, whether of victory or defeat, and the passion provoked by a football medium are not to be seen as ends in themselves but means to an end. These are not expected to evaporate or terminate with a match, but, rather, are to be harnessed for critical citizenship and national integration in a multinational entity like Nigeria. Therefore the basic issue is not whether the self-esteem and national pride are short-lived or if the longevity of the emotions is questionable. Instead, it has got to do with reinventing such emotions for imagining a

national community, and as basis of a collective memory on which a national identity may be planted. This would be achieved through a consistent recount of not only shared victories but also of instances of defeats that offer moments for national reflection.

“Arsenal in the Church”

Sometimes in the year 2010, I witnessed a fundraising event in a Nigerian church where three English premier ship clubs, Arsenal FC, Manchester United and Chelsea FC, were into competition for the prize of the highest donor. The fundraising event commenced with the congregation breaking into club affiliations and the leaders of each ‘team’ rallying members to pooling their contributions into a sum considered handsome enough to win the contest. One after the other, donations from Man U and Chelsea were announced. The congregation, thereafter, eagerly awaited Arsenal to turn in theirs for the winner to be determined. There was indeed a long wait and it appeared the “Arsenal in the church,” needed more time to ensure their donation surpassed those already announced in order to retain the “trophy”, which I was told they won the previous year. The waiting game was longer than envisaged and at a point, an expectant pastor who also functioned as the Master of Ceremony had to yell, “Arsenal! Are you there?” There was lull in the church and the waiting game continued! “We can’t afford to lose,” the “captain” of Arsenal said, as he implored the “Gunners,” a camp I also belonged, to up their contributions to a level that would guarantee “victory.” The long-standing silence was eventually broken when the club’s donation was passed to the pastor. With the announcement, “And the winner is

. . . Arsenal,” the club’s supporters leapt in ecstasy, screamed, congratulated one another, and affirmed their invincibility and determination to continue the winning streak. Indeed, Arsenal won and the church, too, profited from a participatory fundraising event organised around a potent identity sphere in Nigeria. But the whole event illustrates the strength of an identity constructed around consumption of English Premiership.

Football Fandom, Alternative Nationalism and Economic Development

The history of football fandom in Nigeria did not start with European football clubs. In the 1970s and the 1980s, the Nigerian Football League enjoyed tremendous followership comparable to the support being exhibited by Nigerians for European leagues, especially the English Premiership. Prominent clubs of the era include Rangers International Football Club of Enugu, IICC Shooting Stars of Ibadan, Stationery Stores of Lagos, Sharks of Port Harcourt, Niger Tornadoes of Minna, Raccah Rovers of Kano, Mighty Jets of Jos, Bendel Insurance of Benin and Leventis United of Ibadan. The two decades also produced legends such as Christian Chukwu, Segun Odegbami, Emmanuel Okala, Felix Owolabi, Alloysius Atuegbu, Haruna Ilerika, Baba Otu Mohammed, Adokiye Amiesimeka and Mudasiru Lawal, among others. These players at different times, constituted the nucleus of the national team then known as the Green Eagles. Some cities had more than one club thereby making local derby an interesting feature of the league. Popular derbies were encounters between Shooting Stars and Leventis FC in Ibadan, Bendel Insurance and New Nigerian Bank in Benin, Stationery Stores

FC and ACB FC in Lagos and Rangers International FC and Vasco Dagama FC in Enugu. The IICC Shooting Stars and Rangers International FC fixtures were opportunities to rekindle old rivalry, which sometimes took the form of Yoruba and Igbo ethnic chauvinism. The matches were generally characterised by violent conducts of both home fans and the travelling fans, with the latter always waiting to retaliate any ill treatment. The Nigerian League witnessed decline during the 1990s, with the period also coinciding with the ascendance of the English Premiership.

English football as a product that advanced media technology has entrenched in Nigerian and, indeed, many third world countries' homes during the last two decades, and which people consume with passion. English Premiership matches, especially those involving top clubs like Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool and Chelsea, attract huge followership and for many, maintaining the identity of one of the clubs is not only trendy but indicative of good understanding of the reality in world of football. Although enlisting as a fan of a particular club entails no formal process, it is required of a supporter that he publicly show emotion toward 'his' club whenever they play, in addition to fraternising with co-fans within and outside the football space. Football fandom, no doubt, has grown in popularity, and is popularly perceived as a form of social formation that unites football lovers and provides them with a platform to display emotion, shared sentiment and relieve themselves of the tension and strain instigated by the harsh socio-economic reality in Nigeria.

The status of the English Premiership among football fans in Nigeria might be said to have been enhanced by the advent of cable

television. The other important factor is the springing up of television viewing centres all around, where matches are watched mainly by those who could not afford cable television in their homes or subscribe to the sport channels that broadcast live Premiership matches. There are also those who, though, have access in their respective homes wish to savour the near stadium's atmosphere provided at the viewing centres. These weekly interactions with the Premiership through the television medium result in a kind of affinity with the teams and a sort of psychological connections with English spaces. Three clubs, Arsenal, Manchester United, and Chelsea, stand above other English Premiership clubs in terms of support base and this may be ascribed to two factors. First, Arsenal popularity soared when Nwankwo Kanu, hero of the all-conquering 1996 Olympics football team, was recruited by the club, and about the same time, Celestine Babayaro, another member of the Olympic team, was also recruited by Chelsea. The club later signed another Nigerian player, Mikel Obi. But, beyond the presence of Nigerian players in Arsenal and Chelsea, the overall success of the three clubs both in England and in Europe endear them to football followers around the world, not leaving out the fans in Nigeria.

The ninety minutes or so that fans of these clubs spend watching a Premiership match in a viewing centre, usually, sum up everything about the passion demonstrated toward English club-sides. The clubs are "my club," and the players "my boys." The intricate process of transfer of player from one club to another is reduced to personalised market transactions conveyed in expressions like "the boy I bought," or "the one I put my money on." All the players are spoken of familiarly

and their career histories recounted offhand. Another remarkable feature of most viewing centres is the sitting arrangement, which is patterned after the stadium's. The seats are arranged in rows and fans of a club sit in their own section of a usually improvised and unventilated auditorium. The viewing is frequently interrupted with chants of "gunners for life," "up Blues," "up Man U," as the case may be, and the chant is often louder with the club that consider themselves to be at advantage. At half-time, fans move out of the auditorium for analysis of the first forty-five minutes and predictions of the substitutions a coach is likely to make during the second half of the game. Interestingly, most fans sit on even when their team appears to be losing, and in their despair we could yet find uncommon expectation, hope and benign optimism. More often than not, the match does not end in the viewing centre, as success and failure are endlessly expressed over the weekend and sometimes, up till the early hours of the following day.

Anthony Giddens has defined nationalism as "the cultural sensibility of sovereignty, the concomitant of the coordination of administrative power within the bounded nation-state" (Giddens, 1985: 219). Inherent in this definition is the idea of nationalism as inward looking, and as that which emanates from a process of objectifying the nation-state and justifying it not only as exceptional but also venerable. Nationalism entails that citizens get sentimentally attached to their nation-state, revelling in her success and grieving at her failure. It energises local production and consumption through patronage, empowers governance, and creates a sense of connection with structures associated with the nation-state.

But beyond these, a strong sense of nationalism commits citizens to sacrificing personal ideals for those interests considered national. On the other hand, alternative nationalism is presented here not as counter-nationalism but as a feeling of oneness established upon a medium extraneous of the nation-state; a sentiment which, though, does not discountenance the state, consistently violates an unflinching loyalty to the state, especially in the instances when such external concerns conflict with the national interest.

From the formal and informal interviews conducted with fans, and from personal observations, the relationships many Nigerians bear with English Premiership clubs though may not appear to be diminishing the notion of the nation-state as a space for nationalism, are suggestive of an alternative nationalism built upon English Premiership identity. When, for instance, people ask to know the team you are supporting, the answer often expected is in the mould of "I am Arsenal," "I am Man U" or "I am Chelsea." Ironically, for someone to identify himself as a fan of "Shooting Stars," "Rangers," "Bendel Insurance" or any of the other clubs in the Nigerian league will definitely not depict the fellow as a country person because the English Premiership identity is present even in the most remote village, but rather, as one that pretends to be more patriotic than others. Even corporate organisations are cognisant of the pervasiveness of Premiership fandom and have been particularly ingenious in employing it for enhancing their businesses. Mobile telephone companies, for instance, send to their subscribers messages such as: "To follow your club for only #50/week, text Chelsea, Man U, Arsenal or Man City to 4800." The above text message is not only evidential

of the popularity of English Premiership in Nigeria but it, as well, represents it as a veritable medium exploited for business and commercial promotion. In fact, how capital transfer is implicated in the consumption of English Premiership constitutes an important aspect of the discussion in this article.

Like those 'Arsenal in the church,' supporters of Premiership clubs fancy their membership and express their unflinching allegiance to their clubs in phrases like "Gunnars for life" and "Blues for life" in addition to the rare emotion shown whenever their teams play. By reason of birth and location, the fans are citizens of Nigeria but deep underneath, they belong to an "imagined community" of the English Premiership, whose membership cuts across space and class and whose affinity is mediated by media technology. It is these clubs that are "flagged" in their everyday lives (Billig, 1995) and it is them that personify the very basis of camaraderie, and, as well, appearing as the only platform that blurs the border of ethnicity and religion among Nigerians. An alternative nationalism that is implied in this relationship encompasses not only the passion demonstrated toward Premiership clubs, the feeling of togetherness engendered among fans, and the various representations of the clubs in their lives, but includes identification with an alternative social formation that exemplifies a kind of excellence, fineness, and quality all of which is thought to be absent in the Nigerian state.

The emergence of English clubs as social categories or identity domains in Nigeria may also be interpreted within the larger context of the imperialism project of globalisation. It is true that Nigerians are passionate about football, and would display patriotic sentiments

whenever their teams play. But 'Arsenal in the church,' from what I observed, is not just an expression of identity with football. The whole idea of a church mobilising fund through foreign clubs' identities, the competition engendered by the process, the "we feeling" among supporters, the financial sacrifice they made to ensure victory, and the feeling of fulfilment provoked by their emergence as the highest donor are to be understood as aspects of a globalisation project, which de-emphasises the local, and gradually integrates people into a world of corporate citizenship. The identity of English Premiership clubs, which people carry represents at one level, a post-modern consciousness built upon a desirable and irresistible football experience. At the other, it speaks to a complete immersion into a disparately federated world where Western cultural products and values are meant to be embraced by a section of the world rendered receptive by reason of the level of their economic and technological development. Indeed, a fan commented after the church fundraising event that the church was "wise" in her choice of Premiership clubs as platforms for mobilising people to participate in the event. Wisdom, here, has definitely got to do with ability to appropriate sentiments and convert them into capital. However, the promotion of an identity whose basis is not in autochthony, but over and above national options, can perhaps be explained within the context of popular acknowledgement of the foreign, especially the West, as the global metaphor for development. 'Arsenal in the church', thus, serves as a window into a mostly unacknowledged but powerful imperialism of English Premiership in Nigeria. From every indication, organising fund-raising along foreign

clubsides is a way of affirming that everyone in the church bears a foreign club identity, which can sway them into making handsome financial contributions. Furthermore, the resolve of Arsenal's supporters to make the highest donation and their commitment to upping same in order to achieve their target clearly demonstrates loyalty to a club and belief in her ideals. Also, Arsenal fans, by their resolve to win the "prize" for the highest donating club, were also not oblivious of the club's philosophy, which was not that of striving to be among the top teams in the English Premiership, but being at the very top of the table at the end of the season – a goal they have achieved a number of times. And in their leader's statement, "we can't afford to lose," is boldly conveyed, the very idea of pride, values and commitment to a set of principles whose foundation is firmly rooted in tradition and memory.

Furthermore, the knowledge that fans have actors, events, and places connected to the world of English Premiership arouse their consciousness of England, which is popularly imagined as a space of football experience. But beyond such level of perception, many fans of Yoruba extraction refer to England as *illu nla* (the big city), or *ile ileri* (the promised land), as latest additions to its earliest colonial perception as *illu aba* (land of royalty). Both latest constructs suggest a longing for a contact, which mostly could be physical considering that Western Europe and the United States have remained a dream land for many Nigerian youths. Still within this frame, Old Trafford, Stamford Bridge, and New Emirate are known as football arenas but are also widely constructed by fans as "homes" and places of their invincibility. For instance, a Chelsea fan, Tolu Ilesanmi commented that "I can never

lose at home" while John Nwosu, a Man U fan enthusiastically declared that "my dream is to be at the theatre of dreams, the Old Trafford." The admiration and yearning for the adopted homes, which they called "my home" are further accentuated by marketing promos, which render opportunities to watch Premiership matches live at the respective stadia in England as winning prizes. Although the notion of these places and of events transpiring there appear in fans' discussions of their clubs, certain practices associated with the clubs, such as the Man U fans "wearing of designer clothing which are seen as properly Mancunian" (King, 2000: 422), are yet to be embraced, and this may be due to the dire economic condition of an average Nigerian fan, which inhibits their taste or consumption ability. Invariably, what we have is mostly a familiarity mediated by improved communication but limited by reality of Nigerian social and economic situations. Nevertheless, Nigerians' passion for English Premiership has not only brought England very close to many Nigerians, perhaps in terms of psychological affinity, it might have, as well, increased the interest people have of other facets of the English society like their cities, politics, and social formations.

The strength of "we-ness" among fans of a club also tends to be powerful and enduring, often lasting beyond viewing centres and possibly extending to other spheres of social interaction. There are stories about youths offered employment because they, at job interviews cleverly demonstrated affinity with a member of the interview panel in terms of club identity. A fan I interviewed also spoke about a policeman letting off a traffic offender whose vehicle bore a memento that indicated

shared club identity, and drivers who in heavy traffic conceded the right of way to vehicles that carried club's insignia showing mutuality of interest. For instance, Yemi Adelodun, a Chelsea fan, narrated how the bannerette hung in his taxi came to be of assistance in an encounter he had with the Nigerian police. In his words:

I was stopped at a police check point and an officer walked to me and demanded my driver's licence. I knew it had expired three months earlier but I still gave it to him. He checked through and told me it had expired. I feigned ignorance. He walked round the vehicle and asked if I was the owner of the vehicle to which I answered in the affirmative. He then paused for a while and asked about the team 'we' would be playing at weekend. I asked if he meant Chelsea and he said Yes. I provided the information he requested for, and after spending about two minutes discussing Chelsea, he returned my driver's licence and asked me to go and renew it.

This kind of story definitely makes sense in the Nigerian social and political context clouded by ethnic chauvinism and some other forms of identity prejudices. The experience of Yemi Adelodun is particularly significant considering that men of the Nigerian Police are notorious for exploiting commercial motor drivers. By taking Chelsea as a common appealing identity, the policeman who, most likely, could not have been persuaded by the ethnic group or religious affiliation of Adelodun underscores the shared sentiment of Premiership fandom as deep-seated and more important than other identity markers that regularly define the basis of inclusion or exclusion in social processes in Nigeria.

Most Premiership fans, however, did not see their identification with premiership clubs

as conflicting with their Nigerian identity. These fans argued that international football, which usually draws the participation of Nigeria as a country, was not a regular occurrence, just as many of them failed to hide their preference of English Premiership clubs over clubs in the domestic league. The sentiment they showed toward Premiership clubs, for them, was not to be interpreted as resentment for the Nigerian national teams or indication of exclusive support for English national teams. Many of them claimed they were still passionate about the national team though would prefer to watch their Premiership clubs as against the national team in the event that matches involving the two occur simultaneously. Such preference, an informant, Yinka Ajila explained, emanated from the history of success associated with the English clubs and the flair they consistently brought into every football encounter. Ajila argued further that the Super Eagles "fumble" at crucial moments when much hope would have been put in them, whereas for Chelsea, it was almost a certainty that they would win silverware at the end of every season. He pointed to the fact that only the "big four" attract huge followership as indicative of people's association with the spirit of success. In other words, patriotic sentiment demonstrated to Premiership clubs is informed by the need to fill a void supposedly created by the non-performing domestic football league.

An important aspect of the English Premiership fandom has to do with the manner in which many fans construct Nigerian football in relation to the English Premiership. On a rather large scale they dismissed the Nigerian league as drab, poorly organised, and devoid of aesthetic value. An Arsenal fan that I had a chat with on the prospects of making Nigerians

watch the national league in the same way they patronise the English Premiership, commented thus: “You can see that the difference is very clear and I doubt if anyone who can admire good things will ever choose to watch our league when the Premiership and La Liga are there” (Olu Agbetuyi, personal communication). Sentiments like this abound among English Premiership fans in Nigeria and are basically built on the idea of an alternative, an option, which is considered more desirable and attractive, irrespective of where it is provided. Another Man U supporter who simply identified himself as Sola told me he only watched the national team or local clubs when they play outside Nigeria. He alluded to both the deplorable condition of stadiums in the country and the poor television coverage of matches, which he considered as largely responsible for the absence of aesthetic elements in football in the country. A negative attitude to the local is thus reinforced by contemplation on the poor state of football infrastructure in Nigeria, which most fans blamed on the class of political elite who are widely perceived as having run the country aground. The fans’ lack of interest in Nigerian football, for instance, was further confirmed when none of those I spoke to knew when the domestic league season would close or the team that was on top of the league table. Other fans were also of the view that it would be difficult for the local league to develop to the standard obtained in England and other European countries due to reasons that were purely economic. A university lecturer and a fan of Manchester United, Dele Faleye, also explained the impact of football globalisation on the Nigerian league from the viewpoint of the relationship between imported goods and

locally made ones, stating that the Premiership was like some foreign imported goods, which would continually be attractive to consumers in Nigeria except certain measures were put in place to encourage patronage of the local league. Such measures, he said, “must ensure the protection of the local league from the current competition which the Premiership provides while government makes effort to upgrade the facilities of football in the country” (Dele Faleye, Personal Communication). This view, though not a popular one borders on the implication of unbridled economic liberalisation for the survival of local brands, including football in Nigeria and, indeed, developing countries of the world as a whole.

Another point which is related to economic consideration is the amount fans paid to watch a match at the stadium and at a television viewing centre. Some fans who claimed they could not afford the actual cost of watching a local league, which include the ticket fee and the transport fare to the stadium, argued that the Premiership match was a cheaper alternative that was also within reach. Others suggested that it was not just the financial implication that informed their preference but also the value or satisfaction derivable from the amount expended. While these opinions represent the choice made by fans as economically rational, such views, as well, provide insights into the contribution which Nigerian fans are likely making to the development of the English Premiership, and the power of global media in conditioning people’s taste. In the first instance, the fifty naira or so that fans pay to watch a match at a viewing centre does not go to the centre’s operator in entirety but trickles down, with substantial part of the money finding its way

into the bank account of the English Football Association (FA). Fans were well aware that DSTV, a cable television provider, bought the sole right to air Premiership matches in Nigeria from the English FA, and that the company also recouped the investment through monthly subscription paid by her customers that include the viewing centres operators. This cost, they, as well, agreed is eventually transferred to the fans that pay to watch matches at the various viewing centres. Secondly, it is possible that the choice, which fans make between watching a local league match in the stadium and watching the Premiership at a nearby television viewing centre, is a function of accessibility – a choice rendered affordable and rational by the instrumentality of global media.

From all indications, there is no doubt that an extensive movement of capital is involved in the Premiership business and some fans consider the effect this could have had if such funds were retained in the domestic league. For them, economic sustainability of football in Nigeria is only achievable when people turn out in stadium to watch live matches. Yinka Ajila, arguing from this standpoint, averred as follows:

You can imagine the level of income that will accrue to clubs in Nigeria if the aggregate of fans at viewing centres turn out at stadia every week to watch the local league. This would also have translated to better quality than what we presently have since clubs would be able to offer their players good contract that would make them stay in the country (Personal communication 2013).

Loss of very important resources needed to develop the local league and resultant brain drain are implied in the view represented above. Ironically, the loss of economic and human

resources to western countries have been the bane of many Third World countries, especially in Africa and scholars had in the past interpreted such losses as part of orchestrated ploy to stifle economic growth in the developing countries. But fans' knowledge of the challenges confronting the local league and a seeming concern about its survival may not be indicative of an admiration of the league. It is "good football" they admire and how their taste or consumption preference impedes the development of the local brand is largely unknown to many of them who in their conversations implicitly consider themselves to be financial stakeholders in the various Premiership clubs, especially when making references to the signing and transfer of players.

Conclusion: Globalisation and the Return to Colony

A number of issues having to do with the English Premiership as a domain of identity in Nigeria have been raised in this paper. First, that identity formation and negotiation are implied in people's interaction with English Premiership club-sides are clearly suggested. It is also argued that football globalisation provokes an alternative nationalism and allows for a denigration of the local league on account of a perceived higher utility derivable from English Premiership matches. Even when these issues are rarely considered to be among the most serious challenges confronting Nigeria as a nation-state, they yet exist as a core area for contemplation, and are likely to attract more attention in the nearest future, most especially when the key assumptions of globalisation are currently being questioned.

In opening up the analysis of globalisation

to cover some other shades of actors, Saskia Sassen identifies “a broad range of partial, often highly specialised, global assemblages of bits of territory, authority, and rights, (TAR) that begin to escape the grip of national frames” (Sassen 2008: 61), and examines the implications of these assemblages for nation-states, arguing that though the new assemblages, may not represent the end of national states, they, in a way, disassemble the national by unbundling traditional territoriality. Sassen further identifies the distinguishing element of the new assemblages as their capacity to “de-border” or exit existing normative orders, and more importantly “constitute particularised ‘normative’ orders internal to each assemblage which easily amount to mere utility logics” (Sassen, 2008: 62). The ability of such assemblages for cross-border manifestation is further enhanced by advanced media technology, which often blurs the boundary of geographic space or facilitates the spread of supra-territoriality (Scholte, 2000). Sassen, for instance, comments as follows on global network of financial centres as a type of specialised assemblage:

We can conceive of financial centres that are part of global financial markets as constituting a distinct kind of territoriality, simultaneously pulled in by the larger electronic networks and functioning as localised micro-structures for those networks. These financial centres inhabit national territories, but they cannot be seen as simply national in the historic sense of the term, nor can they be reduced to the administrative unit encompassing the actual terrain (e.g. a city), one that is part of a nation-state (Sassen, 2008: 65).

For Sassen, therefore, the idea of territoriality surpasses geographical space to include an operational domain, mediated by

electronics and accessible to a wide range of actors and participants functioning across space and time. Although Sassen’s treatise occurs basically in relation to legal jurisdictions, market, financial centres, and the civil society, it is nevertheless applicable to other aspects of the globalised world, most especially, that each of the specialised assemblages produced a specific form of territoriality. However, since the idea of territoriality as suggested by Sassen primarily covers “the national state exclusive authority in a very broad range of domains” (Sassen, 2008: 64), of which will include extracting absolute loyalty from citizens, there is bound to occur territorial conflicts, moreover that such assemblages operate within national territories.

Following Sassen, we have suggested in this article that the global transmission of English Premiership through cable television and its fanatical reception by people domiciled in Nigeria would represent the Premiership as a territory populated by a network of fans who are, as well, citizens of a nation-state. Invariably, “Arsenal in the church,” while appearing to be a harmless affair devoid of any detrimental effect on the Nigerian sociocultural milieu constitutes a Premiership assemblage, which offers an alternative nationalism that possibly divert citizens’ commitment away from the nation-state. Moreover, beyond being a mere utilisation of foreign clubs’ identity for fundraising, it serves as an indication of the power of foreign capital and the extent to which Western brands are promoted in ex-colonies as factors and aspects of identity. More essentially, it creates cause for concern amidst the dwindling fortune of Nigerian national teams and local clubs, provoking deeper reflection on globalisation and development in

the third world countries and the role of advanced media technology in a seeming re-colonisation project. In Premiership fandom among Nigerians, therefore, we may find implicit a form of post-national identity that underscores foreign consumption and hinders the emergence of a national brand upon which identity can be formulated.

Globalisation, no doubt, has its 'merits': economic growth, democratisation, rule of law, and the rest. But to what extent can one rationalise a phenomenon that directs peoples' gaze from their own ability, initiative, and creativity toward foreign merchandise represented as superior and more fascinating? Or shouldn't one weigh up the role of power and its relations in the universalisation of a product, which, ordinarily, is national? And more still, what direct benefits, we may ask, accrue to Nigeria from her citizens' consumption of a foreign brand to the detriment of local production? We may not have answered all these questions here, but certainly have outlined how a new form of identity structured around an extraneous entity that is made local by globalisation has emerged as the basis for group solidarity and mobilisation. Of main concern, here, is the fact that football, rather than being a space for the expression of national identity as initially promised, has turned to be an agent for the enslavement of the Nigerian mind, which is skewed toward an externality that jealously guards her own economic and cultural interests, setting regulations and determining the basis for accommodating extraneous products. The implication then is that the forces of globalisation though not particularly coercive are focused on the very weak states that are devoid of mechanisms for self preservation,

opening their economy up for exploitation by the more industrialised societies, providing platform for suppression of local options, and imposing a culture of dependency.

Globalisation, Hope Eghagha suggests "does not require annihilation but working together after all differences have been recognised" (Eghagha, 2004: 161). However, amid growing identification with the English Premiership, and gradual drift of national football into irrelevance even when total extinction might seem improbable, globalisation could not be said to have worked with Nigeria to advance football as a medium for the formation of a national identity, an aspect crucial to the country's survival as a nation-state. In other words, the diminishing role of Nigerian football as a uniting agent and the promotion of an alternative nationalism through a foreign football medium underscore the negative impact of globalisation on the politics and economy of developing countries. The overbearing presence of the English Premiership, the scale of its consumption, and its preference by a wide range of Nigerians, all of which are engendered by Western media, therefore, are evidential of a renewed colonisation of Nigeria by another world, which though well situated outside Nigeria yet harnesses the local resources, including viewership, for accumulation of capital necessary to promote the well-being of her own citizens.

A national identity definitely suggests that there are specific ways of national remembering, of everyday reification of the nation-state, and of interactions with the very structures that embody national collectivism. With the process of inventing an identity for Nigeria almost assuming a mirage due to the

centrifugal forces of ethnicity, religious plurality, and resource contestations among others, the idea of a foreign product well situated outside of any of the divisive structures would appear an effort at forging a national consensus. An assumption of this nature represents the English Premiership as an emerging national identity for Nigerians. More so, the choice of the Premiership clubs category as a medium of fund mobilisation in a church might suggest its primacy as a social grouping over other identity domains like ethnicity, which is often thought of as a more potent tool for social mobilisation in Nigeria. But whether this is a conscious choice made by a people or a manipulation of local condition by a “global” process, we are yet confronted with a situation of a nation-state not being able to rally sufficient tools, symbols and memories for the attainment of national unity or for creating critical citizenship. In all of these, one thing certain is that the identity shared with English Premiership clubs as an outcome of integration into an internationalised world would not facilitate a permanent demolition of ethnic or religious borders in Nigeria or produce an effect that is Nigerian.

An alternative nationalism strives not at emerging as the fundamental basis of imagining a nation but refers to such extraneous constructs as can compete with the state for the attention and loyalty of the citizenry. In essence, while the purpose of this article is not to demonstrate how the English Premiership has facilitated the replacement of the Nigerian identity with the English, it could be essential in pointing out the aspect of “imagined community,” which English cities have gradually emerged into. In forming social networks around Arsenal, Manchester United

or Liverpool, the English Premiership fans in Nigeria would be seen as expressing identity with the cities of London, Manchester and Liverpool. But while such identity, ordinarily, might not translate into loyalty or sentimental attachment to England, it would not be far-fetched to suggest that it directs Nigerians’ gaze from the domestic football, and creates in the fans a kind of apathy and complacency that renders the local unattractive and uninteresting.

Finally, and on a rather positive note, although some people criticised the intensity at which Nigerians identify with and show loyalty to foreign clubs, describing fans as those suffering from mental colonisation, only a few disagree that watching English Premiership clubs play fill a vacuum in the lives of the population, especially the youths who are desirous of alternative social formations to provide them succour amidst the near failure of the Nigerian state.

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