

NOLLYWOOD AND FANATICISM IN FOOTBALL FAN BASE IN NIGERIA: LESSONS FROM SELECTED VIDEO FILMS

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Abstract

Sports occupy a pride of place in the life of the contemporary society. This applies to football with greater emphasis. It has also been observed that a serious negative trend has gripped football fan base in Nigeria and indeed other African countries as football activities of distant countries are now rallying points for our youths to the point of fanaticism. The quantum of violence, loss of human and material resources occasioned by this negative trend is so grave with no possibility of stopping in the nearest future. It becomes more worrisome to note that this is done at great expense to the future of sports in Nigeria as these youths show great apathy to the local football and other sporting activities within and around us. Since the present generation is an audio-visual one, our film makers have also tried in documenting this in films as a way of curbing this trend. Through a critical content analysis of selected video films, this work x-rays the contributions of Nollywood, the video film industry in Nigeria, in this regard. The media concept of Afghanistanism and the theory of Agenda Setting serve as conceptual and theoretical backings. The paper concludes that much still needs to be done to curb this menace. Recommended are ways parents, religious institutions, government, the academia, and, most importantly, Nollywood can help ameliorate this situation.

Key words: fan base, fanaticism, Nollywood, Afghanistanism, Agenda Setting theory.

Background Information

The importance of sports to the human society cannot be over emphasized. Sporting activities have been part of humanity from the earliest times. Man utilized sports for reasons ranging from the satisfaction of his aesthetic needs, to relaxation and purposes of healthy living. Hannah Okediji gives some insight into the concept of sports saying

Sports are the various activities which man engages in from childhood to adulthood which promotes the acquisition of mental, physical, spiritual, aesthetic, emotional and educational well being to make the individual contribute meaningfully to the development of the society.

Sports are divided into the following categories: athletics, gymnastics, individual/dual sport, team sports, rhythms dance, martial arts and combative sports. There are other types of sports like: football, volleyball and so on (2015, p. 189).

Sporting activities in their early stages continued in the crude and haphazard ways of practicing them until some form of formalization were introduced. In like manner, over time some negative trends crawled into sporting activities both on the side of participants and spectators. Worthy of note also is the fact that in contemporary time, the indispensability of sports to the contemporary society applies to football (soccer) with greater emphasis. And so does the impact of negative trend in sports apply to football with greater quantum.

The increasing love and awareness of football as well as the growing negative trends in the game has become of serious concern to the generality of the society especially in Nigeria and other African nations. Every strata of the polity has shown one form of concern or the other. Our audio-visual literature is not in any way left out here. Nollywood, the Nigerian video film industry, has ventured into passing critical comments on the fast spreading negative trends in sports orientation in Nigeria. The essence of this paper is to x-ray the contributions of Nollywood, the Nigerian video film industry, towards the fight against this negative trend in soccer in Nigeria through a critical reading of the contents of selected video films.

Conceptual/Theoretical Backings

This paper is anchored on the conceptual and theoretical backings of the concept of Afghanistanism, and the Agenda Setting Theory which is also traced to tilt towards the Diffusion of Innovations Theory. The concept and theories are inevitable in the achievement of the set objectives of this work.

The Concept of Afghanistanism

The Wikipedia cites *Webster's third new international dictionary, (unabridged version 2002)* as defining Afghanistanism as “the practice of concentrating on problems in distant parts of the world while ignoring controversial local issues” (Wiktionary). To the Wikipedia,

Afghanistanism is a term, first recorded in the United States, for the practice of concentrating on problems in distant parts of the world while ignoring controversial local issues. In other contexts, the term has referred to "hopelessly arcane and irrelevant scholarship," "fascination with exotic, faraway lands...

The exact origin of the concept of Afghanistanism is still irreconcilably controversial. The Wikipedia cites the *Oxford English Dictionary* as listing Afghanistanism to be a US colloquialism and providing the first written citation to be from 1948 thus: “J. Lloyd Jones in *Probl. Journalism (Amer. Soc. Newspaper Editors Convention)* 73, I don't wish to belabor this subject of Afghanistanism, this business of taking forthright stands on elections in Costa Rica, while the uncollected local garbage reeks beneath the editor's window.” (n.p) Continuing, the Wikipedia also states that “...columnist Joe Klein wrote in *Time* magazine in 2010 that the term originated in the 19th century when "the British press defined *Afghanistanism* as the obsession with obscure foreign wars at the expense of domestic priorities.” (n.p)

Apology is here rendered for the use of the *Wikipedia* here. This was occasioned by the fact that the researcher could not lay hands on other sources for more vivid discussion of the concept of Afghanistanism. The *Wikipedia* was therefore the last resort.

Brayton Colin tries to discuss the concept of Afghanistanism in the Nigerian context. To him, the term Afghanistanism is a word that is a bit on the creative side. He further states thus:

... the practice of writing about far-away issues while shying away from tackling the problems at home. It originally applied to editorial writing but had come to be applied to all forms of journalistic writings. Dare (2000) points out that during the Buhari era, commentators and analysts took to Afghanistanism, writing earnestly and candidly about tyranny and human rights violations in virtually every spot on the globe except Nigeria. He however added that all those other places were simply a metaphor for Nigeria. Afghanistanism can be as a result of fear or lack of courage. Since charity should begin at home, if the mass media shy away from tackling serious local or national problems by pre-occupying themselves with harmless discussions of issues which are largely irrelevant to a majority of their audience, then the journalists who work in these media are irresponsible and unethical, failing in their duty which the society expects them to perform with courage and dedication (Para. 4).

The Agenda Setting Theory

The idea of this theory is said to have began much earlier before it was introduced as a media function. In 1922, Walter Lippman came up with a work titled *Public Opinion* in which he argued that

...people aren't able to deal effectively with the variety and subtlety of their environments. Most people are protected from their own surroundings by elites. These elites, or media representatives, interpret the motives and beliefs of politicians (cited in Muin, 2011, pp. 1 - 2).

Ifeanyi Ojobor summarizes Lippman's work as saying that the media help to "put pictures in our heads" (2002, p. 21). Bernard Cohen was to further expand this view in 1963 when he opined that "the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1963, p. 13). This, says Muin (2011, p. 2), "became the basis for what we now call the agenda-setting function of mass media."

Agenda Setting Theory was formally propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw and extensively discussed in their work "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Media" (1972). In a study conducted in the Chapel Hill, North Carolina in which they interviewed registered voters during the 1968 Presidential Elections in the USA, they found significant

relationship between public ordering of issues and media coverage. In the exact words of Adams, Harf & Ford, “These two theorists saw an association between mass media and society’s opinion and as a result, theorized a cause-and-effect relationship between the power of the press and the public opinion that is known as the Agenda Setting Theory” (n.d., p. 2). The core proposition of the agenda setting theory, according to McCombs (2005, p. 546), is that “elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent over time on the public agenda. The media not only can be successful in telling us *what to think about*, they also can be successful in telling us *how to think about it*.” Having studied the political campaigns of 1968, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw arrived at a proposition that “people learn from the media what the important issues are” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176).

By its agenda setting function, the media indirectly tilts towards the diffusion of innovations theory. In his book *Diffusion of Innovation* (1962), the professor of rural sociology, Everett Rogers, popularized the theory of the diffusion of innovations. Ojobor (2002, p. 21) cites Katz et al (1963) as defining diffusion as

...the process of spread of a given idea or practice, over time, via specifiable channels, through a social structure such as a neighbourhood, a factory or a tribe.

Similarly, Melvin Defleur defines diffusion as “the way in which more members take up the new item over some time span” (2010, p. 229). Once an innovation is made, many years may be required for it to spread. According to Little John and Foss (2008, p. 322), “Rogers states, in fact, that one purpose of diffusion research is to discover the means to shorten the lag.”

In their work *Communication of Innovation: A Cross-Cultural Approach*, Rogers and Shoemaker define innovation as

...an idea, practice or object perceived as new by an individual. It matters little, so far as human behaviour is concerned, whether or not an idea is ‘objectively’ new as measured by the lapse of time since its first use or discovery. It is the perceived or objective newness of the idea for the individual that determines his reaction to it. If the idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation (cited in Defleur, 2010, p. 229).

With the above definition, it becomes clear that

...even such common objects as a form of popular music, a clothing style, the use of lipstick, an automatic rifle, a different code for sexual behaviour, a set of religious beliefs, or even a slang term can seem to be an innovation to a person who has not encountered it before (Defleur, 2010, p. 229).

For an innovation to diffuse there must be awareness stage, interest stage, evaluation stage, and trial stage. Hence, diffusion of innovation refers to “the pattern by which something new is taken up by members of a group or society” (Defleur, 2010, p. 229). The diffusion may be by Personal Adoption, within Group, or Between Groups. The rate of the adoption or diffusion depends on perception of the innovations relative advantage and its compatibility with existing values and experiences. Diffusion scholars believe that the media can and should lead the people into getting aware of the existence of an innovation. From there, they get interested, make an attempt to evaluate it, give it a trial touch before making up their mind to acquire it. It should be pointed out here that there are five different types of adopters namely: (1) innovators (2) early adopters (3) early majority (4) late majority and (5) laggards.

Synopsis of the Selected Films

Crazy Fans 1 & 2

The story of *Crazy Fans* revolves around Janet (Patience Ozokwor) and Barnabas also known as Mr Man U (Chiwetalu Agu) who runs football viewing centres individually. Janet is an ardent supporter of Chelsea Football Club and dedicates her football viewing centre to the club. Hence, she is also known as Madam Chelsea. On the other hand, Barnabas is ardent supporter of Manchester United Football Club. He dedicates his football viewing centre to the club as a result of which he is also known as Mr Man U. The football viewing centres also double as beer parlours. Madam Janet and Barnabas are arch enemies because of their fanatic support to these rival football clubs. As the film progresses, they both get information about an oncoming match between Chelsea Football Club and Manchester United Football Club. To attract more people to their individual stores, both of them separately organize road shows to sensitize the fans of their clubs. On the day of the match, there is great tension between the fans of the clubs in the viewing centres. As the match progressed, the generating set in Mr Man U’s viewing centre develops fault which forces the fans watching the tension soaked match there to

relocate to Madam Chelsea's viewing centre. Meanwhile, Chelsea Football Club began to trail behind the Manchester United Football Club by two goals to one. In their frantic efforts to equalize, their rival, the Manchester United Football Club, sealed the match by adding another goal. In their bid to celebrate the winning, fans of the Manchester United Football Club incurred the wrath of the fans of the Chelsea Football Club which led to the stabbing to death of a fan of Manchester United Football Club by Martins (Junior Pope), a fan of the rival club, Chelsea Football Club. Martin is arrested and taken away by the Police to be appropriately dealt with in accordance with the laws of the land.

Synopsis of *Mr Ibu the Chelsea Fan*

This film makes much use of episodic plotting. In the film, Sampson (John Okafor) is an ardent supporter of the Chelsea Football Club. His wife is a supporter of the Manchester United Football Club; while their only son, Jay Jay (Osita Iheme), is a fan of the Barcelona Football Club. Sampson wants every member of his family support the Chelsea Football Club. He threatens his wife and son at every slight provocation to be Chelsea fans or leave his house. He also threatens to stop eating any food prepared by his wife unless she becomes a fan of Chelsea Football Club. Close to a football match between Chelsea Football Club and Arsenal Football Club, he takes a giant goat, clothed in the jersey of Chelsea Football Club, to a native doctor to request for the victory of Chelsea Football Club. There, he meets two fans of the Arsenal Football Club who also came to request for the victory of their club. Because the said fans of Arsenal Football Club came with a small fowl, the native doctor chased them away on sighting the giant goat brought by Sampson. The same day, he gets home to see the wife putting on the jersey of the Manchester United Football Club. He did not waste any time before beating her. On the day of the match, Arsenal Football Club won Chelsea Football Club which makes Sampson angry at home to the extent of going on hunger strike. During the course of the film, Sampson sacks his driver for being a fan of Arsenal Football Club. He decides to drive the commercial bus himself only to quarrel with any passenger who supports any football club other than Chelsea Football Club. As such, he kept losing monies as such passengers are refunded before they are discharged. As the film progressed, we also see two beggars, Musa and Belle always quarrelling because each of them supports a different football club. We also see a motorcyclist who is a fan of Chelsea Football Club refusing to carry a passenger who is a fan of Arsenal Football Club.

Lessons from the Selected Video Films

Two major negative trends are brought to the fore in the films above. These are fanaticism on the part of fans of various clubs, and sports betting. These two negative trends have led to violence that have consequently occasioned very have loss of human, material and man-hour resources in Nigeria and indeed Africa as a whole.

Fan Violent Fanaticism and Criminality

A number of definitions have been attempted for the concept of violence. But so far, one of the most acceptable definitions is given from the sociological point of view is by Mimica, Bogdanović (2007, p. 346). It states that

Violence encompasses all acts and activities which may be designated as the use of force or the threat of using force by the agent (offender) against the object (victim), regardless of the type of force, with the aim to directly or indirectly inflict pain or cause fear and suffering to the victim so as to place the victim's behaviour under the control of the perpetrator of violence (cited in Milojević, Simonović, Janković, Otašević & Turanjanin, 2013, p. 8).

Violence is criminality defined as an extreme form of aggression. It is a complex social, political, cultural, psychological and ethical phenomenon implying the use of force, threat or the abuse of power against another person. In recent times, violence has come to characterize very many aspects of human endeavours including sports where it applies with double emphasis.

Violence-related offences in sports are considered criminal offences in some countries and are qualified as misdemeanours in other countries. In the exact words of Kostić, (2008, p. 59), "Violence in sports implies each word or action of a sportsperson, coach, referee, parent, spectator or other participant in a sports event, which inflicts injury on those involved in the event" (cited in Milojević et al, 2013, p. 10). This is most common in contemporary time among spectators or fans. There is no specific statutory definition of fan violent criminality. Yet, it's most common understanding point to violence or disorders which involve sports fans. It is a serious social problem affecting various parts of the world. Aggressive-violent activities are typical of adolescents and very young adults and mostly result in loss of property, injuries to persons, and even deaths. Deserving

of special attention is fan violent criminality in football. This is so because of the notable massive scale of football/soccer.

Football fan-violence criminality can be induced by a number of factors including the nature of football, too much emphasis on result, behaviour of players, referee decisions, behaviour of supporters of the other club, and other events taking place on the sidelines of the match. It can also be induced by betting (staking) behaviour of fans prior to the match. This will be isolated and treated under a different heading. Instances of Football fan-violence criminality abound in the history of football.

As a social institution, football has its followers and admirers. It also has its fanatics who also strongly associate with their clubs as an extension of their own sense of personal and collective achievement and ego. Hence the strong support and love for their teams with include attempts to attack perceived oppositions or obstacles. In the films under scrutiny in this paper, instances of this abound. In *Crazy Fans*, the characters of Janet and Barnabas are arch enemies because they are supporting two rival football clubs- Chelsea Football Club and Manchester United Football Club respectively. It got to the extent of Janet refusing to give out her daughter's hand in marriage to a suitor who is close to Barnabas and by extension a fan of the Manchester United Football Club. We also see such antagonisms among fans of other clubs including best friends such as Martin and his close friend in *Crazy Fans*, as well as Musa and Belle in *Mr Ibu the Chelsea Fan*. The height of it is reached in *Crazy Fans* when a fan of Manchester United Football Club is stabbed to death of by Martins who is a fan of the rival club, Chelsea Football Club.

Instances of such fan violence that have led to death abound in Nigeria. Umeasiegbu and Agbanusi (2002) chronicled some of such in Nigeria and indeed Africa. In more recent times, the death of Igeniwari George who was killed in Mokola area of Ibadan after Rangers knocked out Stationary stores of Lagos in an FA cup in 1995. Igeniwari was then a player with Rangers International of Enugu, and was shot by hooligans after an FA Cup game against Stationery Stores. He later died from the gunshot injury. Fresh on our minds also is the violence that followed the UEFA Champions League final match between Manchester United Football Club of England and Barcelona Football Club of Spain which ended in favour of the latter team. Mackey Robert (2009) reports the incident thus:

... a fan of the losing side in Nigeria apparently took out his frustrations by plowing his minibus into a crowd celebrating Barcelona's victory (Para. 1)

Reuters reports that the disappointed Manchester United fan was arrested after he killed four people and injured 10 in the town of Ogbo. A police spokeswoman told the news agency: "The driver had passed the crowd then made a U-turn and ran into them" (Para. 2).

Reuters notes that both teams "have large fan bases in Nigeria." Last summer, when Manchester United played an exhibition game in Abuja, Nigeria, fans from across the country converged on the stadium, and a star player said that support for the club there was "quite unbelievable" (Para. 3).

In *Mr Ibu the Chelsea Fan*, we witness a situation where a commercial motor cyclist who is a fan of the Chelsea Football Club refused to carry a passenger who was putting on the jersey of the Arsenal Football Club. The major character of the film Sampson is a fan of the Chelsea Football Club while his wife is a fan of the Liverpool Football club and his son, Jay Jay, a fan of the Barcelona Football Club. This brought various shades of confrontation in several instances in the film to the extent of Sampson withdrawing his promise of financial supports to his son. The film also presents a scene where Sampson sends the driver of his commercial bus parking because the driver is a fan of the Arsenal Football Club.

There is another dimension to this negative trend that is worth discussing here. It is the link between alcohol intake and violent sports fan criminality. Drinking of alcoholic beverages is an activity that provokes the fans to act in a violent nature. Yet, the business of football viewing (commercial showing of football) and the sale of alcohol complement each other in Nigeria. It is only on few occasions does one see them exist independent of each other. The Nollywood films *Crazy Fans* and *Mr Ibu the Chelsea Fan* contain instance to prove this point. In *Crazy Fans*, Madam Janet (Madam Chelsea) and Mr Barnabas (Mr ManU) are involved in both businesses. Bottles of already consumed alcoholic drinks are also freely displayed in manners suggestive of product placements. It was an empty bottle of Star Larger beer in Madam Chelsea's shop that Martins broke to stab the Manchester United fan.

A major source of worry and concern is occasioned by the fact that the supporters in Nigeria are making enemies among themselves for clubs playing their games in Europe and other continents. A major bulk of these

fans does not even know the teams playing in their domestic leagues not to talk of the players of such teams. This seriously tilts towards Afghanistanism. Hence, Martins admonishes in *Crazy Fans* saying:

On the day this incident happened, I realized that Drogba, John Terry, Mikel, they are all there making their money. And I'm here dying for them even to the extent of taking a life... I want to tell everyone out there, every dedicated fan of any club that we all should not fail to enjoy football because it is not but a game. And in every game comes a winner and a loser. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Even the character of Musa in *Mr Ibu the Chelsea Fan* points out the nature of Afghanistanism football fan base in Nigeria and other African nations saying "... football is made in heaven, played in Europe and enjoyed by people in Africa."

Sports Betting

Sports' betting has become common place in the contemporary Nigerian society as sports betting platforms marginally by the day. This phenomenon could be said to have started with the pool betting. Betting in sporting activities come in the gambling fashion. In gambling, money or anything of material value is staked on an event with relatively uncertain outcome with the primary intent of winning additional money or material goods. In sports betting, people engage in the activity of staking money to predict sports results to win some more money if the eventual outcomes favour their prediction. Generally, the probability of earning more money easily is a leading motive for the engagement in sports betting.

In the films selected for this paper, we see instance of betting in sporting activities notably football. In *Mr Ibu the Chelsea Fan*, we see instance of sports betting in the scene where Sampson abandoned his wife and Jay Jay their son. As the duo were tracking home, Jay Jay had to excuse his mother to settle a bet of how many Arsenal players featured in the last world cup competition. As the film progress, we are also presented with another scene where two young men came to Jay Jay to settle a bet of two thousand naira staked for the most successful club in England. The nastiest of the betting is seen in *Crazy Fans* between Martins and his friend. Martins had staked that Chelsea Football Club will win Arsenal Football Club. Unfortunately, their stake this time is not money or any material goods but their girlfriends. And when finally, Martins won the bet, he took the benefit of the bet to the last by making love to his friend's girlfriend.

Conclusion

It has been established in the course of this paper that sports fan violent criminality and sports betting are two negative trends that have gripped sports orientation in Nigeria in recent time. Youths and young adults are the most affected. This has to be arrested in the best interest of this nation. The paper believes that the media can do well in curbing this menace. Of the other media, the medium of film can better serve this purpose because of the pride of place it occupies in the contemporary audio-visual friendly generation. Nollywood film makers should rise up to the challenge and put the sociological functions of the art to bear. Yet, care must be taken in screening scenes of violence and bloodshed in such films.

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