



Football's Fandom in Africa as Popular Art: a Multidisciplinary Approach

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This study examines football fandom as one of the contemporary football cultures in four Sub-Saharan African countries, namely Kenya, Cameroon, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It aims to do a comparative analysis of how these football fandoms form and play out. Within this framework we focus on how the unique contextual realities in the selected countries influence the construction and performance of these football fandoms. The thesis of this study is that the nature of football fandoms in the selected countries reflects on the societies that produce them, an argument that has also been proposed by Stanley Eitzen (2009). Football fandom is a modern practice that also incorporates local cultural beliefs and practices. The focus on the geographical and socio-cultural templates of football fandoms of the selected countries is important to our study because it provides a window through which we can perceive and appreciate the political and socio-cultural situations and tensions that inform the supposed popular cultural trend of football fandom.

The study proceeds on the premise that the practice of modern football fandom is glocal and examines the similarities and differences that play out in across the four countries selected. In this way the study problematizes the view that popular cultural forms are homogenous and predictable. In Kenya the modern football fandom base is Euro-centric and is defined by a shift of the fan-base from local football to the English Premier League and European Champions League football. Most of the Kenyan football clubs virtually have no fans but English clubs such as Arsenal, Manchester United and Chelsea have a wide fan-base. In Zimbabwe there seems to be a balance between the support of local football and that of English and European football. In Cameroon there is a developed culture of local football that has been motivated by the success of the national team in international football. In South Africa, the vexed issue of race has also found its way into the way contemporary football fandoms are played out in this society. As a result fandom culture plays out in different ways in these four countries, nonetheless there are still similar fandom practices.

This study will explore the influence of globalisation of European football especially through the influence of media on local fans. The study therefore problematizes the interplay between the local football fandom and international football fandom practices. This argument is best captured by Carrington & Mcdonald (2001) when they describe a specific situation that obtained in England in 2008 when Richard Scudamore, the Premier League Chief executive, proposed that since modern media has globalized sport, the English premier league should

redesigned in such a way that some matches are played in other locations out of the geographical confines of England. Scudamore's argument was dismissed on the grounds that football teams have local fan bases that are attached to the teams in a local way. This question is important because it also invokes Eric Dunning's (1988) conceptualization of the process of making a football fan, which in particular recognizes the importance of geographical location of a football club on the football fan formation.

Another important focus of this study is to show the gendered nature of football fandoms across these four countries. Messner et al (2000) argue that modern football in its various institutionalized practices seems to be a reconstruction of the ritual spaces of hegemonic masculinity which have been otherwise superseded by the liberalised nature of the post-industrial revolution social cultural reality. He argues that such institutions as football fandoms are reactions to the modern condition that has reduced the gap between men and women. However, the spaces in which international football is consumed such as bars, social halls and even homes are more organised and women friendly, as compared to the traditional spaces in which local football is consumed. The construction and expression of these fandom identities is also gendered as women and men are influenced by specific social cultural realities in the performance of their fandom identities.