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‘Here, we are all equal!’: soccer viewing centres and the transformation of age social relations among fans in South-Western Nigeria

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The spread of soccer viewing centres (SVCs) in Nigeria is one of the unfolding legacies of global sporting media in Africa. While, providing access to live broadcast of European soccer competitions, SVCs have developed into supplementary social spaces where culturally defined rules of social relations are contested. Using Goffman’s notion of *performance* and *Agbalagba* in Yoruba normative system, in conjunction with sociological perspective on space, the study explores the context and processes in the transformation of age social relations in Ibadan, South-Western Nigeria. Data were obtained through participant observation, and 23 in-depth interviews with viewing centre owners and soccer fans. Findings depict the SVC as a constructed space, with conflicting meanings, attitudes and practices, which inadvertently fracture and render fluid, the expectations of norms of age social relations. In conclusion, European soccer drives the spread of supplementary social spaces which impact local social structures in critical ways.

Introduction

In Africa, as in other regions of the world, soccer motivates the connection of millions of people. Many people have formed several fan groups across social, political, economic and cultural divides. Different aspects of this global sport have been analysed, with noticeable concerns in the literature for issues of fan violence,¹ fans identities and representations,² and the increasing impact of globalization and neoliberal processes on fan practices, experiences and the consumption of soccer.³ In this study, we examine the ways in which the recent penetration and growing patronage of European soccer in Nigeria have led to the creation of the supplementary social space called the soccer viewing centre (SVC). As an interactional space in the sense of pubs⁴ and public football viewing areas,⁵ the study explores qualitatively the social processes which shape the transformation of culturally defined norms or social relations of age in SVCs. While, age norms has different meanings,⁶ it refers, in the context of this study, to widely shared understanding about the rules that regulate social relationships between old and young people in the society.

The spread of soccer viewing centres in Nigeria is one of the unfolding legacies of global sporting media on the African continent. While, the origin of the SVC has not been fully assessed, its development is nonetheless linked to internal and external processes, including the decline of domestic soccer, increased participation of

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Nigerian players in European leagues, and the spread of neoliberal policies and practices in the Global South.⁷ The access to the global sporting media in particular, provides opportunities to live, all-year-round broadcast of European soccer competitions – mainly the Premier League, La Liga, Serie A, Bundesliga, and the two major European championships, the UEFA Champions League and the Europa League. In order to benefit from these, local entrepreneurs increasingly set up viewing centres, which are mostly run-down, wooden constructions with zinc roofing. Because of how they are organized, these monetized spaces depict the crude, rigid hierarchization and contradiction that characterize modern soccer viewership at the local level: while, they are open to everyone in theory, fee-for-entry requirement excludes many and men remain the dominant patrons.

For the mostly male patronizers of SVCs, monetized access permits the participation of people across all ages; children, youths⁸ and the elderly⁹ alike. But what social dynamics do age differences engender at SVCs? In many societies, age is a substantive category with critical social, political and economic proclivities.¹⁰ In Africa particularly, age is an important status marker, and almost everywhere, age norms that transmit from one generation to the next continue to shape the social relations between young and old people.¹¹ Indeed, the widespread belief that age (or old age precisely) is a culturally legitimate means of ascribing knowledge, respectability, authority and power is central to the idea that African societies are gerontocratic. However, some scholars cautioned against this belief, warning that within the context of a world inundated with ‘global flows’, it would be erroneous to assume that such age-defined systems of social relations are not always under construction.¹² Specifically, Ogola emphasised that the ‘...meanings of age are contingent upon spatial crossings of Africans, and upon several social, political and cultural factors, which are themselves, in a continuous flux’.¹³ By framing the SVC as a space of ‘flows’ on the one hand, and age norms as a system of social relations on the other hand, the study explores the ways in which European soccer is impacting on local social structures in the city of Ibadan, south-west Nigeria. Using Goffman’s¹⁴ notion of ‘performance’, the concept of ‘Agbalagba’ in the Yoruba belief system,¹⁵ and recent spatial theorizing in sociology, the study describes how the SVC increasingly brings young and elderly soccer fans ‘face-to-face’ and how this encounter in turn, fractures the norms, rules and expectations of age.

Viewing soccer and fandom in Nigeria

Since soccer was introduced in Africa by the colonialists towards the end of the nineteenth century, it has become the most popular sport on the continent.¹⁶ In Mali, Ly¹⁷ observes that ‘If there is any other development in Malian TV that parallels that of the *feuilletons* [soap operas], or rivals it in its viewership, it is sports; particularly soccer or *le soccer*’. Across varied African socio-political settings, soccer clubs are enmesh in national politics¹⁸ and modernization discourse,¹⁹ and they continue to play crucial roles in everyday mood, sociability and identity of thousands of people.²⁰

Today, innovations in satellite television and digital technologies have deepened the penetration of soccer on the continent. In African cities and villages, fans connect and identify with soccer clubs in Europe through digital spectatorship, symbols and imaginations.²¹ Through the activities of large privately owned media companies, live soccer games from all over the world, especially Europe, are reaching

millions of people via public ‘video theatres’ or ‘trans-local stadiums’.²² Due to the social, political and cultural negotiations that occur in these virtual public arenas, scholars now acknowledge their relevance in thinking about the impact of soccer viewing and fandom on the African society.²³

In Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country, soccer is the most popular sport. Apart from the imbalance in women’s participation,²⁴ soccer viewing and fandom in general attract people from all social strata.²⁵ According to Olaoluwa and Adejayan,²⁶ soccer fandom in Nigeria is not an arbitrary practice but an audacious engagement, which the fans exhibit through passion, affinity and identity formation. In Majaro-Majesty’s²⁷ view, the identities forged around soccer fandom in Nigeria is comparable to an ethnicity, both in its unifying and divisive character. Unfortunately, the spectacle of European soccer in the past two decades has displaced interest in domestic Nigerian leagues. In order to explain the phenomenal rise of European soccer in Nigeria, two interrelated factors are critical: (1) the growth of transnational media culture and; (2) the changing pattern of soccer fandom. Transnational media, especially the variants that mainly projects foreign shows and programmes, helped to promote European soccer and initiated local fans into European fandom. As a result, a shift in loyalty among local fans has become visible.²⁸ In Omobowale’s words:

Prior to the 1990s in Nigeria, soccer fans were aligned with local clubs. With increasing globalisation, fans are exposed more than ever before to the performances of foreign clubs and these have inevitably resulted in a redirection of fans’ alignment with European clubs.²⁹

Satellite TV access increased European soccer patronage/viewership and accelerated fandom mobilization and practice. Nigerian youths and elderly take part in viewing imported soccer competitions from Europe. In rural Benue, one study shows the high foreign contents of programmes on digital, satellite TV, shifted preference from local soccer by 892%.

Onwumechilia and Oloruntolaba³⁰ believe that the continued spread of European soccer through transnational media is a form of electronic colonialism. Nevertheless, the number of Nigerians with satellite TV subscription is still very low, due to the high cost of subscription (about \$63/month).³¹ Consequently, most Nigerian European soccer fans view games at SVCs.³² As with pubs and other public viewing areas, the SVC is a space of community identification and identity formation. Nigerian SVCs afford fans the opportunity of engaging with fellow fans, while they also serve as spaces for relaxation outside the home.³³ Unlike pubs, however, SVCs in Nigeria are common to poor, high-density areas and slums.³⁴ Because of this, some people perceive the SVC as a criminogenic space; a ground for unemployed and unengaged youths to disturb public peace under the guise of being ‘soccer fans’.³⁵ Unlike public viewing areas also, the permissiveness of the SVC is only true to the extent that fans can pay for access.

As an interactional space, SVCs in Nigeria are characterized by interesting behaviours and practices. For instance, fans often show knowledge of, and share information about Europeans clubs and players.³⁶ Also common to the space are betting discussions, arguments, ‘fan talks’ and active team support, alliance formations, jokes, taunts and teases, as well as insults and confrontations, all of which occur under a tacit rule of free expression. Although empirical work on these features are only just emerging, fandom practices such as heated arguments, rough talk, mockery

and negative statements are recognized as major drivers of conflict³⁷. For instance, about teasing, Adetunji³⁸ observes that interactions among patrons are characterized by positive, neutral and negative teasing expressions. While, teasing may provoke anger, he emphasized that fans generally remain friends/acquaintances after the games, thus making teasing a symbol of connectedness. However, Adetunji failed to take account of age differences and the ways it can influence socio-relational outcomes among young and old people in SVCs.

Given the place of age in regulating social relationships in African societies, what dynamics emerge when young and old people co-participate in teasing and other forms of fandom practices in SVCs? In 'performing fanship' and identifying with others, how do socio-culturally constructed meanings shape and reshape age relationships among soccer fans? To explore these questions, the next section introduces the meanings of age and ageing among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria and the concept of performance as advanced in Goffman's sociology. Both ideas are further interrogated using recent social theorizing on space and social interaction in order to hypothesize the possible ways that SVCs are changing the social relations of age in the city of Ibadan.

The Yoruba age norms, performance and the SVC space: a theoretical comment

According to Omobowale,³⁹ ageing to the Yoruba people is a valued process, leading to a stage in life when an individual assumes the position of an 'elder' and enjoys reverence and awe. Given the belief that old people are repositories of experience, knowledge and wisdom, they are highly valued among the Yoruba. Society expect old people to exhibit noble characters as a way of earning a respectable status. The poetic discourse espoused through the concept of *Agbalagba* in the *Atari Ajanaku* poem illuminates the peculiarity, nature and context of age social relations among the Yoruba. As a peculiar phenomenon in the Yoruba cultural and moral universe, the notion of *Agbalagba* obligates young people to respect the elderly and emulate them.⁴⁰

It is noteworthy that old age does not automatically confer prestige, respect and honour on the elderly. Instead, old age only complements values associated with good character when an old person actively and consistently behaves in accordance with culturally prescribed expectations. The direct opposite of *Agbalagba* is *Agba langba*. *Agba langba* denotes bewilderment and a stigmatizing disdain that accompanies the misnomer of character. The *Agba langba* ascription depicts the failure of the elderly to behave as an *Agbalagba*. Whereas *Agbalagba* is an insignia of 'nobility', *Agba langba* represents 'ignobility'. Thus, the *Agbalagba* thesis commands a social relation that is not only hierarchical, but also deterministic over social behaviours within the context of interaction. In this wise, age norms and expectations operate as a systems of social control.⁴¹

Goffman's idea of 'performance', as elucidated in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, presents further theoretical insight that serves as a corollary and counterpoint of *Agbalagba* in *Atari Ajanaku*. Goffman defines performance as all the activities of a given participant, on a given occasion, which serves to influence other participants. A performer enacts his/her performance in the presence of others, the only place that the performance becomes valid. These 'others' contribute to the performance as the audience, observer or co-participant. The pre-established pattern

of action that unfolds during a performance, and presented or played on other occasions is a part or routine. A routine or part is ‘the pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance, and which may be presented or played through on other occasions’.⁴²

Goffman explains that performance is valid only when it is oriented towards others; that is, it is social relational in nature, and is depicted through role taking, which is the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status such that the performer forms social relationships with others – the audience, observers and co-performers during the performance. The performer may be sincere or cynical: while, the ‘sincere’ performer can be fully taken in by his own act, the ‘cynical’ actor can choose disinvolvement in the performance, owing to a lack of faith and conviction in his own performance. When interpreted as a form of performance, *Agbalagba* becomes a role which is social relational; a role which the performer may choose to express sincerely (hence, *Agbalagba*) or cynically (*Agba langba*). In the movement between the *Agbalagba* and *Agba langba* roles, however, the spaces within which specific human interactions occur is important.

In recent social theorizing, the role of space in defining and structuring the boundaries of social interactions is acknowledged. As Zieleniec⁴³ observes, ‘Space is shaped by human relations, but conversely, human relations are also shaped by space’. Drawing on Gorge Simmel’s notion of ‘boundary’, in forms of sociation, Zieleniec explains that space is a social construction which:

...sets real and potential limits on that space and its contents. The boundary acts to structure the spatial and social relations that can occur between objects and human actions ... The extent to which space ... can be framed or bounded is significant as a fundamental aspect of space, in that not only does it close the space from an ‘outside’ giving it a more ‘real’ and concretised spatial character, it also constructs an inner cohesiveness that is subject to its own, localised regulations.⁴⁴

This implies that space is a critical aspect of social interaction as it can shape how people behave and relate. In other words, the specific spaces within which human interactions occur have deeply entrenched features that mark them apart from other spaces. The logic upon which these spaces also operate differ from one space to another. Put in another way, a space, as not purely a physical or material entity,⁴⁵ could embody cultures, which those interacting within it must be familiar and share mutually in the process of relating. Framed as such, internalized norms become impermanent; something that social actors modify as they move between spaces.

So, while, the Yoruba normative system prescribes that the elderly should behave in a way that befits an *Agbalagba*, fandom is a ‘performance’ or system of practice in which a soccer fan is a peculiar kind of social subject, who plays certain roles that s/he expresses as a ‘routine’ or ‘part playing’. However, the egalitarian and ‘cultured’ nature of the SVC space structure the expression of *Agbalagba* role on the path of sincerity or cynicism. This could introduce different relational dynamics within the SVC, and engender contests over the observance of culturally defined norms of age social relations.

Hence, while, fans in general, including the old and the young, possess a shared understanding of age norms about the Yoruba interactional ethics, the role expectations of ‘fans’ and “others” fandom performances may culturally fracture defined age norm expectations when people come ‘face-to-face’ in the SVC. As such, the sincerity or cynicism displayed during soccer viewing and fandom engagement will

not be determined mainly by the cultural expectations of the Yoruba society. Instead, it will also depend on individual beliefs, symbols of affinity and participation, and on the rituals, fandom performances and the character of SVC space.

Methodology

The study was conducted in the city of Ibadan, Oyo state, south-west Nigeria. Ibadan has various sporting and recreational centres, with an indigenous soccer club that carries the emblem of the city – the Shooting Star Sport Club (3SC). Also, different stadiums have been built to host and promote soccer competitions. The decline of indigenous soccer paved the way for European soccer in the late 1990s, a situation that continued into the millennium and led to the rise of viewing centres across the city. Three viewing centres in three different locations were purposively selected across three Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Ibadan: Agbowo in Ibadan North LGA, Iwo Road in the North East LGA and Akobo in Lagelu LGA. These areas were chosen because of the large concentration of viewing centres in the localities.

Ethnographic approach was adopted in the collection of primary data, using participant observation and in-depth interviews (IDI). The study population consists of the elderly, youths and viewing centre owners. Twenty-three (23) IDI were conducted: 15 elderly and five young SVC patrons and three SVC-owners. The ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 65 years. Because the majority of SVC patrons are males, we were unable to recruit female soccer fans in the study. Three IDI guides with six to seven questions – general and specific – were developed and applied to guide discussion with the participants. The general questions in the IDI guide explored the reasons why elderly people visit SVC, how such visits are perceived by young patrons and SVC-owners, and experiences and narratives of conflict, disagreements or confrontations between elderly and young fans. While, interviewing elderly and young patrons, we asked them to reflect on the statement *ko s'agba n'ile ball*, which means, 'there is no seniority at the viewing centre', and the extent to which they agree/disagree with it and why. Our personal observations of the SVC space over several years show that *ko s'agba n'ile ball* is easily one of the most commonly invoked statements that is deployed by young patrons to both contest and protest cultural norms and epistemologies of old age. Further, as 'space managers', SVC owners were specifically asked to describe the nature of social relations between elderly and young patrons more broadly, and the roles that age differences play in shaping interactions and everyday conversation at viewing centres.

All interviews were conducted on-site at the SVCs. In order to avoid aggression from participants whose clubs were defeated in soccer matches, the interviews were conducted before the commencement of matches, using Yoruba and English languages. Each interview was conducted once, and clarifications of responses were elicited where necessary. In addition, verbal consents were obtained and the confidentiality of the participants were guaranteed. For analysis, data were transcribed, cleaned, coded and thematized accordingly to the questions raised in the interviews. The coding process was managed using a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (Atlas ti. v6). Content and ethnographic analyses were employed for data analysis.

Age norms and soccer viewing centres: contesting ‘respect’

A major issue explored in the study is the ways in which the SVC space accommodates and enshrines norms and practices which fracture compliance with cultural expectations and social relations of age. To start with, the point of view of centre owners is that the social relations between old and young people at SVCs is generally cordial. They also maintain that elderly fans have good relationships with younger fans, and that both groups take pleasure in each other’s company as they share information, and discuss past and present happenings in the soccer universe. This response was influenced by what the centre owners observe, and their positions as relationship managers in the SVC space. Notwithstanding, from the perspective of the fans, contest over age norms was a source of on-going tension and conflicts between young and elderly patrons. While, this rarely leads to physical assaults, disagreements over whether the elderly deserve respect, and under what circumstances this should take place, shapes social relations in the SVC, making it a highly contested social space.

When asked to give opinions on whether elderly fans were being ‘respected enough’ in SVCs, a total of 17 participants, comprising young and old patrons, responded, 76.5% said ‘No’, 17% said ‘Yes’ and 5% said, ‘Yes and No’. Also, six out of 13 participants reported that they had experienced altercations regarding ‘respect’ at SVCs. When Chelsea sold Petr Cech to Arsenal for instance, a boy said to an elderly Chelsea fan, ‘You have sold your glory’, which resulted in an intense argument (Youth 2, 33 years old, Agbowo). Among the Yoruba, ‘selling one’s glory or pride’ has deeper meanings, used at times to describe a context of self-betrayal or when an individual disregards self-respect for personal, short-term benefits. *Ogo* or glory marks the highest point of esteem that anyone could aim to attain in the society. Once the youth invoked this and suggested that the elderly fan (who represents a Chelsea FC in this scenario) had sold his culturally valued asset (in this case, a Chelsea goalkeeper), conflict became imminent.

Apart from what the young people say, however, the tension between certain features of, and among simultaneously occurring actions within SVCs, can also fracture social relations of age. For example, SVCs in principle are accessible to whoever can afford to pay. Thus, capital makes the space ‘a place of mess, where anyone can go in, pay and sit’ (Elderly 4, 53 years old, Agbowo). Likewise, while, betting and teasing are common practices, both may clash with personal sensitivities, thus fracturing age norms in the process. In the case of betting for example, a participant maintains that when money is involved, ‘...there is no respect. If I bet on my club, and the club is losing and you are making jest of me, there won’t be any respect’ (Youth 1, 25 years old, Agbowo). Arguments could also have the same effect, especially when young patrons of SVCs feel a need to assert their rights to participate freely, and support their teams of choice (Elderly 8, 57 years old, Akobo).

‘Agbalagba’ and fans’ construction of the SVC space

One way to make sense of the contest over respect is to attempt to understand, on the one hand, the ways that the SVC is constructed, and on the other hand, the place and expected roles of the elderly in the context of these constructions and how they, in turn, structure respect for old people. From the in-depth interviews conducted, three constructions of SVCs are evident. The first construction is based on the idea of the SVC as ‘a battle zone’. Within this frame, the SVC is an imagined space of

on-going battles, a war zone where fandom practices and emotions clash, compete and conflict. While, young people have been socialized to behave in accordance with age norms from childhood, situations that are peculiar to the SVC fracture strict adherence to these norms. This is mainly due to the patterned structure, definition and redefinition of what constitutes 'appropriate interactions' in the SVC space. An elderly participant describes the SVC as *aju olomo o to*, or a battle zone. He also explains that soccer is a highly emotional game, and:

...The way we react to soccer is different ... There was a particular man, who was watching a match, his team was losing, so he got angry and beat his wife to death. He claimed she was disturbing him at that moment. We all support different teams, so, even as an elderly person, if I insult a youth, whose club is losing a match, while mine is winning, it will 'backfire' (Elderly 1, 61 years old, Agbowo).

Hence, respect for the elderly depends on the context of emotion. As suggested in the foregoing quotation, old people who 'fumble' by being insensitive will likely lose respect from young people, with possible unpleasant consequences.

A second construction, which also shapes the observance of age norms, is the perception of the SVC as 'a social learning space', where the elderly is expected to behave as an *Agbalagba* and serve as a role model to the youths. From the points of view of young and old patrons, the elderly should talk and behave in respectable manners and their composure should be in accordance with the cultural expectations attached to old age. Youths expect the elderly to 'behave like elders' at all times and the SVC space is not exempted. In describing what makes his relationship with young people a 'good' one, an elderly participant explains thus:

My relationship with them is very good and gets better when I start to relate with them at the viewing centre. They learn a lot from me. The way I talk..., also the way I behave makes my relationship better with the youths. For example, when young people hear one make use of a bad language, it is not a good example. Also, an elderly person must always be patient (Elderly 2, 51 years old, Agbowo).

The legitimacy of the good relationship enjoyed by the participant above, derives primarily from behaving like an *Agbalagba*; someone, who can be emulated and thus deserving of respect. Those who deviate from *Agbalagba* roles are perceived as *Agba langba* or an ignoble who fails to 'teach' and 'give good advice'. In other words, '...one should be able to caution the younger ones, when they do what is bad, and one can teach them things, they don't know...' (Elderly 9, 50 years old, Akobo). Corroboratively, a younger participant maintains that the presence of the elderly at SVCs '...is a way to interact directly and indirectly with the youths, and to tell them what they should do and what not to do ... They need to teach and relate to us in ways that will not add to our aggressiveness' (Youth 4, 28 years old, Iwo road). It must be emphasized that the learners are not always the youths nor are the teachers always the elderly. Both groups can serve in the two roles, especially since the youths are perceived to be more knowledgeable about contemporary European soccer than the elderly ones. Yet, it is the failure of elderly people to perform the *Agbalagba* roles of teaching and advising that threatens respect at viewing centres.

A third construction construes the SVC as a normative space in which 'seniority' and 'respect' are not a given nor fixed, but are contested and negotiated. In the study area, the expression *ko s'agba n'ile ball*, which means, 'there is no seniority at the viewing centre', is a dominant and very popular expression, which encapsulates the

contestation around age norms. Young fans routinely invoke this expression to challenge the power structure that confers authority on old age. They also deploy the statement as a means of asserting individuality, independence and the right to free expression. In exploring what the idea of *ko s'agba n'ile ball* means to the elderly, contradictory ideas of seniority and respectability emerged. First, in the SVC social space, old people perceive themselves as occupying an equalizing space. At times, this makes it difficult for them to be perceived as worthy recipients of respectful behaviours. According to some elderly fans, the social space is imbued with expectations of humility and demands a conscious awareness that age-ascribed power is not absolute in the SVC space. Therefore, in visiting '...the viewing centre, you have to bring yourself down to their level (i.e. the level of a youth). You must forget the fact that you are older than them... So, coming to watch matches with the youth makes you an equal with them' (Elderly 2, 51 years old, Agbowo). Being equal, in the words of another participant, implies that the elderly must be 'patient' and '... come down to their level by laughing, joking and playing with them' (Elderly 3, 62 years old, Agbowo).

Also, in relation to the constructed idea of *ko s'agba n'ile ball*, elderly fans engage in a self-reflection in which culturally situated rationalizations are produced to redefine and sustain an ambiguous boundary of respectability. For instance, within the context of the use of abusive expressions by young patrons, old people tacitly fracture age norms as they uphold young people's 'right to free speech' in the SVC space. This permissiveness, on the part of the elderly fans, is rationalized by appealing to cultural beliefs that stress mutual respect, and emphasize, at the same time, the overlapping and interdependent roles of old and young people in any social situation. As observed by an elderly fan in Agbowo:

Statements like 'All Arsenal fans are insane,' and, 'You have sold your glory/pride' should not be uttered because elders are here. But then, elders must also respect young people. There is an adage, *owo omode o to pepe, t'agbalagba o wo keregbe* (A child's arms can't reach the high shelf, neither can an adult's hand enter the gourd). Therefore, respect must be reciprocal (Elderly 5, 54 years old, Agbowo).

Interestingly, some soccer fans interpreted *ko s'agba n'ile ball* in a different way. According to this group of participants, the equalizing character of the SVC does not obviate respect for old people. To an elderly fan, *ko s'agba n'ile ball* is essentially one of the mistakes a young person makes (Elderly 6, 59 years old, Akobo), an erroneous belief which can be traced to the failure in family socialization.

'Home-training' and respect: challenging family socialization in viewing centres

While exploring the changes in the social relations of age at the SVC, the issue of 'home-training' was mentioned a lot. In the Nigerian society, the term home-training is often used to imagine, capture, and represent everything that occurs in the process of family socialization. As it happens in many places, the family is expected to socialize children into the normative structure of the society. The family constitutes the primary realm within which young people develop socially acceptable characters (or *iwa daada*), and learn to cultivate good behaviours (*ihuwasi daada*). So when a young person misbehaves in the community, people may tag such a person as someone that 'lacks home-training'. Here, to lack home-training, indicates a failed family socialization.

Within the context of the SVC, disrespecting an elderly person is attributed to poor home-training by some fans. At least, eight participants mentioned a lack of training as the main factor responsible for disrespect of the elderly by the youths. Young people, who disregard or fail to observe age norms at viewing centres are called 'untrained' and perceived '...as drunks, smokers and thugs'. A participant notes, succinctly:

We were not born in the same place. Home-training matters a lot. So, it is not about 'there is no seniority,' but home-training. Through proper home-training, one will be able to discern truly, at the viewing centre, if seniority exists or not (Elderly 10, 65 years old, Akobo).

In addition, a younger fan offers further support to the view made above, by stating that:

There is seniority ... It depends on the calibre of youths and the kind of training they received at home. As for me, I just come, watch and go home. I don't talk at all and I don't disrespect elders (Youth 2, 33 years old, Agbowo).

Furthermore, on the matter of respect/disrespect, there were elderly and young fans who rejected the idea that the SVC space can be separated completely from the family institution. While, they acknowledged that certain features marked both realms as distinct, some disagreed with the notion that the SVC possesses a normative structure, which challenges or opposes an adherence to, or the observance of, age norms which prescribe that an *Agbalagba* should be respected. In fact, one participant believes that young people subscribe to the norm, as they:

...respect elders without minding the fact that they are at viewing centres. Some people lack home-training and do not respect elders. It depends on the home-training that younger people have. My child comes here at times but because of the training I have given him, he can't be rude to anybody, let alone elders (Elderly 6, 59 years old, Akobo).

Apparently, from the last quotation, it seems that, for some patrons, the SVC is an extension of the home, a space where parent-managed family socialization, continues outside the household. This creates a situation of 'out-of-home-training'.

Age social relations, silence and norms enforcement: strategies and actors

In a space where the elderly could lose respect by participating actively in soccer fandom, certain coping strategies have emerged. Depending on the disposition of the elderly people involved and the extent of his interest in interacting with younger fans, the strategies employed lie on a spectrum that has liberal and conservative attitudes at the extremes. At the liberal end, the elderly fan could take on the role of the other, in the sense that '...anytime an elder comes to the viewing centre, he should put the garb of youthfulness and leave his real personality at home' (Elderly 11, 52 years old, Iwo road). Thus, the liberal elderly fan tries to adapt and blend into the SVC space, with a full understanding of the risks involved. For the conservative elderly fan, however, silence becomes a useful tool to ensure that age norms are observed. The elderly who believes in the observance of age norms perceives silence as an important tool (Elderly 6, 59 years old, Akobo). 'Keeping quiet', it must be noted, means, not participating in heated debates, avoiding arguments, and '...just folding one's arms' (Elderly 4, 51 years old, Agbowo). Here, keeping quiet for

boundary maintenance, is executed as a social action; an ‘actioned-inaction’, which shields and minimizes the exposure of elderly fans to altercations with younger fans, while also making it easy to maintain self-respect.

In-between the two extremes are liberal-conservatives who are desirous of maintaining age norms, but are also interested in engaging in conversations that would allow them to participate as fans in the SVC. In achieving these ends, the liberal-conservative exercises great caution, and he is selective of conversations and the people they engage. An elderly made this point when he explained that:

If anyone talks, I will answer if I need to and if I don’t need to, I will keep quiet. ...I always study the person talking to determine if he is sensible or not before I engage in discussions with him. I do it to avoid anger and fights (Elderly 13, 60 years old, Iwo road).

According to an SVC-owner, maintaining a liberal-conservative disposition is the most effective means of maintaining self-respect, without missing the unique, entertaining experiences of the SVC space. In his words:

I don’t allow the younger ones to disrespect elders, but any elderly person could comport himself by keeping quiet during heated arguments, or participate in arguments whenever he wants to contribute. He should however study the people deliberating before talking. This will minimise disrespect (SVC-owner 2, 44 years old, Akobo).

Whatever position an elderly decides to occupy on the spectrum, there are trade-offs along the way. The liberal for example is at the risk of being treated as a youth, hence, there is a higher tendency for insults and disrespect. Liberal-conservatives, by being too cautious, may overthink the space, and miss potentially exciting fandom engagements. It is certain that silence and boundary maintenance, as tools of conservatives, could lead to isolation from soccer fandom.

What age norms enforcement pathways are in place at the SVC to ensure that the elderly fans engage fully in fandom practices without losing respect? In spite of its equalizing character, its entrenched practices of free expression and atmosphere of conviviality, the SVC is an informally controlled and regulated space where owners and patrons – old and young – collaborate to ensure that the rules of age social relations are observed. As with most interaction spaces, participants readily admit that conflict is unavoidable at viewing centres. This makes conflict resolution, control, and punishment, integral parts of the space.

There are ‘age norms enforcement actors’ who manage the conflicts in age social relations in the SVC, mainly viewing centre owners and the patrons themselves. Since the age norm contest is just one of the multiple contexts that contribute to incidences of conflict in the SVC, owners manage conflicts that threaten age norms in the same way as other forms of conflicts. This is mostly by cautioning young fans and organizing the space in a way that conflict potentialities are minimized (SVC-owner 3, 47 years old, Iwo road).

However, for the sake of fun, young and old patrons seek to maintain a peaceful environment at all times, through group self-regulations. Young people regulate peers who cross the line, while the elderly continuously maintain vertical checks on younger fans (Elderly 14, 51 years old, Iwo road). Accordingly, ‘...if you want to get angry, another person will curb you. ...people always intervene, in order to allow peace’ (Elderly 13, 60 years old, Iwo road). Perhaps, the most interesting aspect of group self-regulations is how the social characteristics of the fans are exploited to enforce age norms.

For example, police officers – who are also soccer fans in the SVC – may intervene to punish disrespectful youths (Elderly 12, 57 years old, Iwo road). This is usually through forceful ejections (Youth 5, 31 years old, Iwo road). At times, the image of the ‘diabolic’ and ‘all powerful elderly’ is just as effective. The image of ‘diabolic elderly’ is grounded in religio-cultural ideas,⁴⁶ and sustained stereotypically by the media.⁴⁷ At the viewing centre, the supernatural powers that the aged are perceived to possess have a strong regulatory capacity. That is, apart from the risk of being physically ejected from the viewing centre, those who disrespect the elderly can be punished supernaturally, through afflictions. As put by a participant, because:

...witches, wizards, *Babalawo* [native doctors] and wicked people are among those who come to viewing centres; when such people are disrespected, one may have problems: some even die. Some youths think nothing can happen to them, yet they keep having problems that are not physical, but spiritual. ...Even the Bible says, *E fi ola fun eniti ola ye fun* [give honour unto whom honour is due] (Elderly 7, 51 years old, Akobo).

Further discussion

So far, the contexts and social processes which shape the social relations of age in the SVC have been explored. We have also shown how participation in the SVC could fracture the norms, and the rules and expectation of age, with a specific focus on the roles of the elderly fans as co-creators, enactors and counter-actors. Among other issues, the study reveals that fandom performance at the SVC often complicates the meaning of *Agbalagba* as conceived in Yoruba age norms. In line with Goffman’s conceptual proposition, the elderly fans in the study participate in soccer fandom as either sincere or cynic performers, or even as both depending on the situation and individual judgement about ‘others’ (mainly young fans) in the SVC space. The attraction of the SVC to all, the choice to participate in, and the egalitarian requirements of performance ‘situationally’ freeze the cultural, differentiating hierarchy between the young and elderly fans. The variable for acquiring the noble status of *Agbalagba* shifts from ‘the culturally esteemed age’ to ‘the competently acquired experience’ generated from successful performance and participation in SVC cultures and norms.

The findings from the study are also consistent with the position of scholars who maintained that a focus on soccer could help us to understand how people renegotiate local social structures and cultures.⁴⁸ The aphorism *ko s’agba n’ile ball* aptly projects the situational deconstruction and reconstruction of Yoruba age norms. While, it represents the SVC as an equalizing, socio-relational fun space for all, irrespective of their social and cultural backgrounds, the elating, entertaining and healing emotiveness of the space comes at a price for the elderly. Elderly fans must condescend to the anti-cultural shocks of youth performance, which threatens his *Agbalagba* status. Thus, the elderly performer in the SVC is confronted by choices and trade-offs that may affect his fandom engagement and cultural standing. The elderly may also choose to perform fandom as a conservative, through silence and boundary maintenance or ‘wear the garb of a youth’ as a liberal. Temporal youthfulness as a liberal-conservative is another option. But as a space of on-going negotiation, the elderly fan may also retain nobility by creatively recontextualizing and

domesticating his role within the SVC. This is done by converting the space and its object – soccer – into a stage in which younger performers are socialized.

Meanwhile, the conflict potentialities of the SVC raise doubts about Adetunji's⁴⁹ conclusion on the outcome of teasing in viewing centres. By insisting that teasing remains a connective discursive tool in viewing centres, Adetunji had exaggerated, and thus 'essentialised', the functional character of tease in fans cohesiveness. His conclusion downplays the norms and cultural beliefs about (old) age and how they 'normally' find their way into social spaces and regulate interactions and relationships between groups in the society. As demonstrated in this study at least, the SVC behaviours and practices that challenge age norms, including those involving teasing, can both connect and disconnect. For the elderly fans in particular, a sustained engagement with the space does not imply that they maintain 'connection', strictly and at all times, with young patrons of the SVC when fandom practices lead to conflict. This is evident in the range of options that elderly fans draw upon when they feel that an *Agbalagba* status is under threat.

Despite the potentiality of the SVC performance space to fracture age norms, centre owners, and young and old patrons function as age norm gatekeepers, who regularly enforce rules of age social relations. The diabolic significance attached to old age commands a perceptual boundary, which defines how far a youth can go in acting in accordance with SVC cultures – rather than following the culturally prescribed rules of social relations. Hence, the youth is presented not as an unfettered, anti-cultural performer but as an active fan, who is debarred by normative constraints of culture. Also, and in accordance with Ogola's⁵⁰ articulation about the fluidity of age-related ascriptions in Africa, the elderly fans are not helpless victims of fan performance at the SVC. They are creative liberals, rather than conservative custodians of cultural normativity, who are willing to shuttle between roles as ethnic natives and members of a global fandom community, unified by a common experience of soccer followership, through the media of public viewing.

Theoretically, this study provides insight into the phenomenon and study of space by setting the stage for an understanding of social relations between young and old in a Yoruba socio-cultural settings, particularly outside the typical cultural space commonly discussed in literature. Also, the study highlights the role of the SVC owners as cultural mediators through their regulatory activities between the old and young fans. A relevant concept to be engaged by further studies is 'the situationality of space'. Within this concern, it will be possible to engage the interplays of age social relations, ethnic cultures, subcultures and counter-cultures in soccer fandom context of 'presumed' gerontocratic societies. It will also be possible to understand the fate of cultural role and positionality in the face of norm-fracturing social spaces. Effort should be directed at understanding how the SVC situationally subdues its occupants socio-relationally, making them situational puppets of subcultural spaces, rather than rigid preservers of mainstream ethnic cultures. In conclusion, within the SVC, fandom and fans relationships are not fixed. Rather, they are characterized by situational role-shock which constantly impresses on fans the need to renegotiation local social structures.

Disclosure statement

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Notes

1. Hodges, 'Hooligan as "Internal" Other?'; Roversi, 'Football Violence in Italy'; Spaaij and Anderson, 'Soccer Fan Violence'; and Vrije and Vliegthart, 'The Contentious Fans'.
2. Alber and Ungruhe, 'Fans and States at Work'; Dixon, 'Learning the Game'; Dóczy, 'Gold fever(?)'; Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans'; and Majaro-majesty, 'Ethnicity, Conflict and Peace-building'.
3. Ben-Porat and Ben-Porat, '(Un)Bounded Soccer'; Dart, 'New Media, Professional Sport'; Dubal, 'Neoliberalisation of Football'; Giulianotti, 'Sport Spectators'; Giulianotti & Robertson, 'Glocalisation, Globalisation and Migration', 'Forms of Glocalisation'; Guschwan, 'Fandom, Brandom and the Limits'; Hognestad, "'Rimi Bowl" and the Quest'; Kraszewski, 'Pittsburgh in Fort Worth'; and Rowe and Gilmour, 'Sport, Media, and Consumption'.
4. Dixon, 'Fan and the Pub'.
5. Rowe and Baker, 'The "Fall" of What?'.
6. See Lawrence, 'New Wrinkles', 309.
7. Majaro-Majesty, 'Ethnicity, Conflict and Peace-building'; Omobowale, 'Sports and European Soccer'; and Ortserga, 'Globalisation: Mode of Penetration'.
8. Following the definition contained in the African Youth Charter, 'youth' or 'young people' are used interchangeably in the study and they refer to persons between 51 and 35 years of age. See African Union Commission, *African Youth Charter*; 3.
9. The chronological definition '60 years and above' is commonly used in categorising people as elderly or old. In sub-Saharan Africa context, this threshold has since been contested as inappropriate because it is not sensitive to the social contexts of ageing in the region where life expectancy at birth was 55 years in 2006. In this study, we adopted the '50 years and above' threshold which was suggested at a workshop organised in 2000 on Minimum Data Set Project on Aging in Sub-Saharan Africa and sponsored by the United States National Institute on Aging and the World Health Organisation Regional Office for Africa. See Kowal and Peachey, 'Indicators for the minimum data' and Velkoff and Kowal, *Population Aging in Sub-Saharan*. Also, the terms 'elderly,' and 'old people' are used interchangeably in this article.
10. Neugarte, Moore and Lowe, 'Age Norms, Age Constraints'.
11. Omobowale, 'Ethnographic Textual Analysis'.
12. Ogola, 'The Idiom of Age', 569.
13. *Ibid.*, 569.
14. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*.
15. Omobowale, 'Ethnographic Textual Analysis'.
16. Akindes, 'Football Bars'.
17. Ly, 'Dispatch from Mali'.
18. Zenenga, 'Visualising Politics'; Fridy and Brobbey, 'Win the Match'; Fletcher, 'You Must Support Chiefs'.
19. Clignet and Stark, 'Modernisation and Football'.
20. Chiweshe, 'Till Death Do Us Part'.
21. Vokes, 'Arsenal in Bugamba'; Farred, 'Long Distance Love'; Baller and Cornelissen, 'Sport and the City'.
22. Akindes, 'Football Bars'.
23. *Ibid.*, 2185; Baller and Cornelissen, 'Sport and the City'; Vokes (2010) in 'Arsenal in Bugamba' reveals how Europe-oriented fandom practices are changing existing pattern of social relations in rural Uganda.
24. Saavedra, 'Football Feminine'.
25. Bankole et al., 'Does Cross-border Broadcast'.
26. Olaoluwa and Adejayan, 'Thierry Henry as Igwe'.
27. Majaro-Majesty, 'Ethnicity, Conflict and Peace-building'.
28. Omobowale, 'Sports and European Soccer'; Onwumechilia and Oloruntolaba, 'Transnational Communications, Attitudes'.
29. Omobowale, 'Sports and European Soccer', 624.
30. Onwumechilia and Oloruntolaba, 'Transnational Communications, Attitudes'.
31. Tade, 'He is Father Christmas'.

32. Tade, 'He is Father Christmas'.
33. Ibid.
34. Majaro-Majesty, 'Ethnicity, Conflict and Peace-building'.
35. Ikuomola, Okunola and Akindutire, 'Ritualised (Dis)order: Street Carnivals'.
36. Majaro-Majesty, 'Ethnicity, Conflict and Peace-building'.
37. Ibid.
38. Adetunji, 'Discursive Construction of Teasing'.
39. Omobowale, 'Ethnographic Textual Analysis'.
40. Ibid.
41. Neugarte, Moore, and Lowe, 'Age Norms, Age Constraints'.
42. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 8.
43. Zieleniec, *Space and Social Theory*, xiii.
44. Ibid., 42.
45. Ibid.
46. Ndamba-Bandzouzi, et al., 'Violence and Witchcraft Accusations'.
47. Fayehun, Adebayo and Gbadamosi, 'The Media, Informal Learning'.
48. Baller and Cornelissen, 'Sport and the City'; Vokes, 'Arsenal in Bugamba'.
49. Adetunji, 'Discursive Construction of Teasing'.
50. Ogola, 'The Idiom of Age'.

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