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Patronage of Local Cinema Halls among Urban Youths in Ado Ekiti, Southwest Nigeria

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Introduction and Statement of Problem

Globally, urban areas are noted for the provision of social and public spaces in terms of education, energy supply, leisure, recreation facilities in order to make life conducive for the urban dwellers. Nigerians are deprived of these facilities in urban centres due to poverty and failure to maintain the existing ones, among other reasons. However, in the words of Simone (2005:1), Africans ensure that they make the city conducive in spite of the challenges they face; they ensure that they make the city 'a platform to consolidate particular approaches to engaging a larger world'. Nigerian youths are no exception and appear to have played a crucial role in this process over time.

One of the means adopted among urban youths in Nigeria in the process of making urban centres conducive for living and meeting the expected status quo is the establishment of local cinema halls (viewing centres) usually constructed with planks and wood benches for the spectators, to accommodate fifty spectators or more. A large television set is usually placed in the hall and connected to cable networks. The proprietors of these cinemas halls (mostly youths) collect a token for tickets from spectators (youths) to watch international football matches and sometimes foreign movies. This is a welcome development considering the ability of youths to re-invent and transform the public space to their survival and satisfaction (Diouf 1996:228; Honwana and Boeck 2005:17; Biaya 2005:214). This further becomes interesting taking into cognisance the importance of recreation, games and sports in the socialization process among youths which unfortunately are not available for them (Cohen 1993; Calhoun 1987; Utuh 1999;

Callois 2001; World Youth Report 2003, 2005). An understanding of the youths involved; the kind of social relations existing among these groups and implications of their actions on the wider youths and the general society therefore becomes important.

Youths constitute 40 to 50 per cent of the population of the urban centres in Africa and they have undergone (and are still undergoing) series of changes and interventions (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995:116; Chingunta 2002; Biaya 2005; Honwana and Boeck 2005:16). Youths have been involved in violence, trafficking (as victims and perpetrators), gangsterism, and revolutions of all kinds (Igbinovia 1998:134; Taylor 2002:19; Aghatise 2002:20), including Nigerian youths. One of the areas where activities of youths become interesting is in the area of leisure. Youths globally are increasingly seeking new ways to spend their free time, out of both necessity and interest (World Youth Report 2003:228). Studies have further revealed that youths, especially boys, often spend their leisure time outside the home with their peers (World Youth Report 2003:243). They are innovative and have contributed in many instances to the development of their communities. However, these positive roles do not usually receive attention as public attitudes, the media, and policies usually consider youth activities as problems to be solved rather than a potential to be observed and developed (World Youth Reports 2003, 2005; Honwana and Boeck 2005:7). For instance, studies often raise fears as regards social space of youths in terms of socio-political and economic issues (Sarr 2000; Economic Commission for Africa 2002; Okojie 2003). This perceived image has affected the type of responses to the youths and the type of studies conducted as regards them.

Understanding who a youth is would further lend a hand in appreciating their abilities in creating and recreating urban spaces. This framework provided by Chatterton and Hollandis (2005:7), while explaining youth nightlife in urban environment, further facilitates an understanding of the spaces in urban centre and how youth fit in and operate within it. They highlighted the urban nightlife as a mixture of *mainstream*, *residual*, and *alternative* spaces. Mainstream spaces are recognised and driven by commercial gain and profit motives. To these authors, key organizations are the dominant figure. Residual community are traditional spaces which have been in existence for a long time. This community exists, but is declining and no longer receives as much attention as before. The last space, the alternative, refers to spaces independently run and spaces which are self-organized and unofficial. This typology becomes relevant in this discourse considering the place of local cinemas in the urban space. The entertainment industry in Nigeria is well-developed and can be subsumed under the mainstream. Traditional cinema patronage as it obtained in typical pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria is gradually giving way as most cinema houses are becoming event or religious centres. Youths are very active in this area as they have created an alternative space in terms of

local cinemas due to the failure of the existing body to provide the needed facilities; the cost involved in the provision of private cinemas; the excitement and the joy in creating spaces for their satisfaction.

A study of these youths become important considering the assertion of Biaya (2005) that brutal violence may not be the only means of expression among youths. To him, games, posture, consumption, and leisure also serve as instruments used by youths to affirm their historical presence as a social group and actors in their respective urban societies. He further argues that once leisure is spatialized, it becomes a founder of street culture. The question we need to ask at this juncture is: how far is this statement true regarding the youths that patronize these cinema halls? Are these youths affirming their presence? Are they likely to transform to other 'group' or association in future? What is the existing culture among these groups? Does their action have impact on the wider youths and society as a whole?

Attention appears to often focus on youth marginalization, negative roles and its implications without a proper examination of survival strategies embarked upon by the youths in urban society and ways of harnessing such activities for the benefit of youths and the larger society. These and other issues inform this study. These issues further become interesting based on the assertion that actors have goals, have intentions and are able to make decisions based on their ability to interact, which allows them to examine possible courses of action, considers their relative advantages and disadvantages and then make choices (Manis and Meltzer 1978:68). It becomes pertinent therefore, to investigate and understand issues that inform the actions of the youths regarding the patronage of local cinemas in Ado Ekiti metropolis.

Based on the above, the study aims at taking a look at the youths patronizing local cinema halls in the Ado Ekiti urban centre in Nigeria. Ado Ekiti became the study area based on the concentration of youths in this area and due to the presence of two tertiary institutions (University of Ado Ekiti and Federal Polytechnic) within the city. The University of Education and the College of Education are also within fifteen minutes drive from Ado Ekiti. Thus, youths who patronize the cinema halls to watch soccer in Ado Ekiti constituted the study population irrespective of their state of origin, religious affiliations or ethnic backgrounds.

The population of Ado Ekiti was 112,657 in 1991 (National Population Census 1991). Presently, the city comprises thirteen political wards as described by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). The study was carried out in Ado Ekiti, the capital of Ekiti State for a number of reasons; one of which is the fact that it is an urban area. Secondly, middle class youths were the focus of the study as upper class neighbourhoods could afford cable television network, hence the absence of such facilities within their neighbourhoods.

In a bid to further situate this study within a theoretical underpin, Weber's Social Action and Use and Gratification approaches became relevant. To Weber, action becomes social in as much as the actor attaches meaning to his action, 'when individual takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course' (Weber 1921,1968:4; Ritzer 1996:321; Haralambous and Holborn 2001:961). The second approach (Use and Gratification Model of Mass Media) is concerned with what people do with media (Chandler 1994). It presents the use of media in terms of the gratification of social or psychological needs of individuals (McQuail 1987:284). These theories highlight social actions as rational, and goal-oriented, taking the social environment into consideration. Further, the theories explain the patronage of mass media as an instrument used by humans to satisfy their social and cultural needs. The youths therefore may visit these halls because of their need to achieve their desired goals, which may go beyond watching football. These sets of actions thus become social, since they are chosen after considering a series of alternatives. Aside from this, in the process of watching football matches, a series of social and cultural negotiations are expected to arise. It therefore becomes important in this study to understand these social negotiations within the space created by youths; what informed their choice of action in the first instance; the existing culture within the group; and implications on the society.

Research Methods

The study drew a sample of 120 respondents patronizing these centres. In selecting the sample, Ado Ekiti was clustered into three areas, namely: High-income communities, Middle-income communities, and Low-income communities. Middle- and Low-income communities were selected because the cinema halls are located in these communities. It appears that the majority of the High-income communities are able to afford cable television in their homes and have no need of such centres.

From the selected communities, three cinema halls were selected for interview. From each selected cinema hall, 40 respondents were selected for the survey, making a total of 120 respondents. Further, from this sample, three respondents from each cinema hall were selected for in-depth interviews. Three proprietors of the cinema houses served as key informants to give information regarding the issues in focus and this was complemented with a participant observation on repeated visits to the selected halls.

A survey questionnaire was developed and administered to the selected respondents. The questionnaires were administered after a pilot study to ascertain the validity and reliability of the instruments. The questionnaire addressed specific issues relating to respondents' socio-demographic characteristics such as age and sex. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents after consultation with them at the each of the cinema houses where they watch soccer matches.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. The study sample was dominated by young men aged 21 to 25, followed by boys aged 16 to 20. The dominance of males relates to the fact that soccer is largely a male sport, and girls appear not particularly interested in watching the game.

The fact that most of the respondents had received significant education (the two youngest being the only exceptions) relates to the fact that this is a middle class community. Regarding other age groups who were not youths and included in the study, they were included in the research because they claimed to be students and also, their appearances, attitudes and responses were like those of youths. The dominance of those in tertiary education is a reflection of the tertiary institutions in the neighbourhood. Besides this, the state is often referred to as a 'fountain of knowledge' due to its perceived educational history and status.

Reasons for Patronising the Centres

This section considers factors prompting the respondents to patronize the viewing centres. The respondents were interviewed on how they knew about the centre; and the majority said they got to know about it through their friends. Other respondents claimed they got to know about the centre through a deliberate search for any viewing centre around. A respondent had this to say during the in-depth interview about how he knew about the viewing centre:

When I gained admission to the university, the first thing I tried to look for is any viewing centre around, as a fan of Manchester (Man U); I saw that a majority of the people in the place who were 'man u fans' so I just located the place and started patronising the centre to watch soccer (Male, 24 years).

Findings regarding the length of time they had been patronizing the centre showed that a minority of the respondents had been visiting the centre for more than three years. On why they visited the centre, half of the respondents claimed they visited the centre primarily to watch soccer matches; and a significant number of the respondents claimed that they patronized the centre just to catch fun and be entertained. This was buttressed by the response of one of the respondents during the in-depth interview conducted on why he visits the centre. He remarked thus:

Though the reason for coming here is to watch football since I cannot afford DSTV cable¹, but in recent times it's not just the soccer matches am interested in, I love to come here to watch people interact, make fun of themselves and more especially I am fascinated when different soccer fans argue over their clubs. To me it's the most entertaining aspect of while in the centre. (Male, IDI, Ado Ekiti, 2009)

Table 1: Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics

Age	Frequency	Percentage
10 years and below	2	1.7
11-15 years	11	9.2
16-20 years	27	22.5
21-25 years	50	41.6
26-35 years	27	22.5
36-40 years	2	1.7
41 years and above	1	0.8
Total	120	100.0
Sex		
Male	101	84.2
Female	19	15.8
Total	120	100.0
Educational qualification		
No formal education	1	.8
Primary school	1	.8
Still in secondary school	3	2.5
Finished secondary school	22	18.3
College of education	3	2.5
Polytechnic student	9	7.5
University student	59	49.2
Apprentice	2	1.7
Graduate	20	16.7
Total	120	100.0
Marital status		
Single	111	92.5
Married	9	7.5
Total	120	100.0

Table 2: Reasons for Patronising the Centres

How they knew about the centre	Frequency	Percentage
Through a friend	67	55.9
While passing by	37	30.8
Others	16	13.3
Total	120	100.0
Length of time they have been patronizing the centre		
Less than 1 year	32	26.7
2-3 years	45	37.5
4-6 years	21	17.5
6 years and above	22	18.3
Total	120	100.0
Reasons for patronizing the centre Fun/entertainment		
To watch football matches	60	50.0
I like the atmosphere	10	8.3
Can't really describe it	22	18.4
Total	120	100.0
What they enjoy most in the centre		
Meeting people	20	16.7
I love the arguments there	26	21.7
Love catching fun	14	11.7
The conducive atmosphere	22	18.3
Watching football	30	25.0
No specific reason	8	6.6
Total	120	110.0

Further, findings showed 8.3 per cent of the respondents visited the centre just to enjoy the atmosphere in the centre. The argument raised by some of these respondents was that viewing centres were such a nice place to relax since they were dominated by fellow youths. An in-depth interview captured this better:

When I come to this place, it is not just watching football that gives me pleasure, there are different characters here. I love the way people sit down looking so serious as if they want to write examinations, and the way their mood changes when their favourite club scores a goal. Not that alone, at the end of the match you hear a lot of debates and gossips about players and their private lives, club side and so on. Some even tell us lies and gossips about the players. In fact, you listen to information and stories you have never heard about in your life in these centres. It's always a nice experience to me any time I find myself there. (Male, IDI, Ado Ekiti, 2009).

A small remainder of the respondents claimed they could not really explain why they patronized the centre. Some of them asserted during the in-depth interview that patronizing the place was a form of relaxation to them; however, they argued that they could not really explain their continued patronage of the centre. They were however sure that they derived pleasure coming to the centre. This assertion was further corroborated during the in-depth interview session with one of the respondents. Her comment is quoted below:

I can't really say that there is anything special here but I still see myself coming here. When I first came in here it was my friend that asked me to follow him to this place. But now when I don't have much to do, I come here because it's close to my house. Apart from this reason, it is always interesting to see my friends argue and shout on one another because of the game and it always amuse me (Female, IDI, Ado Ekiti, 2009).

Assessment of the Existing Sub-culture among the Respondents

This section aims to understand the existing sub-culture in the group. The respondents were asked whether there existed any form of social activity within the group. In response to this question, about 45 per cent of the respondents said yes. Further, they were interviewed about the form of social activity in existence. In response, 20 per cent said chatting among friends was a major social activity, while 19 per cent said it involved playing games. A response in an in-depth interview threw more light on the existing activity:

When we are waiting for a match to start, we gist (discuss) about our 'boys-to-boys' talk ...hope you understand what I meant... we talk about school, our lecturers, the way our leaders govern and we talk about our female friends. (Male, IDI, Ado Ekiti.)

Table 3: Sub-Culture among the Respondents

Any social activity in the center	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	54	45.0
No	66	55.0
Total	120	100.0
If yes what kind of activity		
Talking/chatting	24	20.0
Playing games	23	19.2
Can't describe it	7	5.8
Total	54	45.0
Other activities apart from football in the centre		
Argument/debate	26	21.7
Avenue to meet new friends	30	21.7
Avenue to hear latest information	4	3.3
Watch local and foreign films	9	7.5
Play games	5	4.2
The youthful atmosphere	9	7.5
Listen and dance to music	37	30.9
Total	120	100.0
Have there been cases of violence, clash?		
Yes	34	28.3
No	86	71.7
Total	120	100.0

The researcher also observed the respondents unobtrusively before, during and after some of the matches. In the process, the respondents were observed talking about youthful activities, making fun of themselves, talking about politics and keeping themselves happy while waiting for a match to start or after the end of a match. Further on the perceived culture in the centre, the researcher observed a sitting arrangement reflecting the way club fans wanted to share both sorrows and joy together as occasion demanded. On some occasions, viewers within the centre hurled abusive language at each other which were meant to tease the other person, like 'go and sit down', 'what do you know about soccer': such comments usually occurred at intervals, when arguments ensued among spectators. Other viewers in the hall usually laughed at such abusive words, and any argument usually ended after the end of the match. The proprietors of these centres commented that the respondents hardly fought or engaged in any violent activity. One said spectators usually engaged in hot arguments and debates over players or coaches. This finding suggests that violence is not a feature of youths in these cinema halls: a large majority of respondents denied experiencing violence in the centre. When respondents were asked about other activities within the centre apart from watching football, they reported common and harmless leisure activities. A respondent had this to say regarding the issue of violence in the centre:

We hardly experience violence. Of course we engage in hot arguments over matches but it hardly result to violence, we are here to watch match and enjoy ourselves almost all of us here are friends and yet belonging to different clubs. We are students, and we are matured and we are here to enjoy good soccer. I think the essence of coming here is to get ourselves entertained.

Another respondent had this to say:

Well, I have heard that some of them have almost fought before, but I have seen them engaged in a very hot argument and to me this in itself is bad because any one can be provoked in the course of such hot debates.

Impact of the Group Sub-culture on the Wider Society

This section examines the impact of the group sub-culture on the society. The respondents were asked whether they believed the centre had any positive contributions to the society, and to explain what kind of contributions it had on their lives. In one of the in-depth interview sessions conducted, a respondent explained how the centre had contributed to his life and society:

This centre has a lot of positive influence on my life. There has been several occasions in which I get a free ride to school when I see any fan of 'man u' [Manchester United]. The room apartment I occupy presently was rented through one of the guys coming to watch match here. I was even told of a situation in which somebody got a very good job through a centre like this elsewhere.

Table 4: Impact of the Group Sub-culture on the Wider Society

Whether they believe the centre has any thing to contribute to their lives	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	97	80.8
No	23	19.2
Total	120	100.0
If yes explain		
Meeting new people	73	60.8
It keeps me occupied	6	5.0
It could be a source of income	8	7.5
Cant really explain it	10	8.3
Respondents who said No and reasons for it		
It's a waste of time	7	5.8
Its only for fun and nothing more	16	13.3
Total	120	100.0
Whether they think they can learn anything from the centre		
Yes	83	69.2
No	37	30.8
Total	120	100.0
If yes explain		
Learn new things	48	40.0
Friendship/togetherness	30	25.0
Cant explain better	5	4.2
Respondents who said No	37	30.8
Total	120	100.0

On the other hand, a fifth of the respondents felt the centre had nothing positive to contribute to their society, and gave some reasons for their opinions, commenting that watching soccer is just fun or a waste of time.

The respondents were further asked whether they believed they could learn anything as a result of coming to the centre. A majority said that they could learn about the world around them, in terms of politics, current debate in the country; others said they had learnt about the art of making friends, while a few claimed they could now express themselves better unlike before. An in-depth interview buttressed this further as a respondent gave this remark about what he learned from the centre:

If you want to listen to the latest news in the world, just come to this centre. Some of the information you don't hear in the media are discussed here, only God knows how and where they get such information. But it is a place where you are developed and initiated into manhood ...

For the respondents whose opinion differed from the one above, their reasons for this were captured in a statement made by one of the respondents during the in-depth interview:

I don't think I gain anything special here than watching football. Although they discuss about politics, girls and music... there was a time I listened to them and I discovered that they are all bunch of liars. Some of them say what they don't know just to keep themselves entertained.

The Place of Cinema Patronage in the Lives of the Youths

This section aims at understanding the place of cinema in the lives of the youth. A series of questions were asked on the activities within the centre and how it affected the youths who patronized the place. A large majority of the respondents claimed they had friends in the centre. This may imply that a network of interaction had been built and probably sustained within the centre. To support this, a respondent gave this comment during the IDI session:

I have so many friends in the place now. If I don't go there to watch match in a particular time especially when my club has a match, they will either buzz me or probably come to check me at home. I also reciprocated this when any of my friends did not show up to watch soccer. In most instances now, some of them come to call me at home so that we can go together or vice versa... (Male).

As regards whether the respondents had learnt any new things within the centre, a large majority of the respondents claimed that they had learnt a lot of things in the centre. A slightly smaller majority explained that their behaviour had changed as a result of attending the centre. On what they had learnt, some of them during the in-depth interview claimed they had learnt the art of analyzing issues critically;

Table 5: The Place of Cinema Patronage in the Lives of the Youths

Whether respondents have friends at the centre	Frequency	Distribution
Yes	94	78.3
No	26	21.7
Total	120	100.0
There are rules guiding the centre		
Yes	89	74.2
No	31	25.8
Total	120	100.0
I obey all rules and regulations within the centre		
Yes	91	75.8
No	29	24.2
Total	120	100.0
I learn a lot of things in the centre		
Yes	107	89.2
No	13	10.8
Total	120	100.0
My behaviour has changed in course of visiting the centre		
Yes	74	61.7
No	46	38.3
Total	120	100.0

Table 5 (Continued): The Place of Cinema Patronage in the Lives of the Youths

Whether respondents have friends at the centre	Frequency	Distribution
I would still visit the centre if I had a DSTV cable		
Yes	86	71.7
No	34	28.3
Total	120	100.0
If yes explain		
Meeting people	54	45.0
Catching fun	23	19.2
Watching football	6	5.0
Cant explain	3	2.5
Respondents who said No and their reasons		
It's a waste of time being here	11	9.2
I value my privacy	23	19.2
Total	120	100.0

others opined that they are well informed regarding current affairs both within and outside the country. The in-depth interview report below further captures what the respondents had learned and how it had affected their behaviour:

I think I have learned a lot of new things in the course of coming to this centre. When you hear how people analyse issues you cannot but appreciate the beauty of logical arguments. For me, I used to be shy before now but now I am gradually developing the confidence to contribute meaningfully to discussion; even I can do that now in classrooms when my lecturers ask me questions. I could not do all these before. I think I am trying now. (Male)

These assertions were further buttressed considering their responses on whether they would still patronize the centre assuming they could afford a DSTV cable. Over two thirds claimed they would still patronize the centre.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the patronage of local cinema halls among youths in Ado Ekiti, south-west Nigeria, and demonstrates the abilities of youths to reinvent and create spaces for leisure. The patronage of cinema halls was one of the means of achieving this in Nigeria. The study further revealed that the need to enjoy their discretionary periods was the main reason for patronage of these centres. Further, a majority of the youths interviewed became members of these viewing centres through their peers. A major activity in the place was enjoyment, meeting new friends and learning new things while they watched soccer matches in these centres. According to the respondents, social vices like violence within these centres were rare. Rather, the respondents claimed that the places were venues to relax and meet new people and they further claimed that the centres had contributed positively to their lives.

This study has demonstrated that patronizing the centres was primarily for the purpose of meeting their leisure needs which the government had not been able to meet. The places appeared to be avenues to interact, enjoy their youth stage and get initiated into youth behaviours. Patronage of cinema halls by youths and the sub-culture within the centres did not seem to pose any problem to the youths and the society. Youths in these centres were not engaging in anti-social behaviour at the time of the study. Besides entertainment, the centres served other social and cultural functions which enabled the youths to socialize and operate successfully in the phase of life they found themselves.

There is need to further explore and document other activities of youths in their bid to survive within their milieu. All these become important considering the assertion of World Youth Report (2003:214) regarding youths and leisure activities across cultures. Discretionary time plays an integral role in young people's individual development and the development of their communities; the availability of a range of constructive, voluntary activities and opportunities to engage is critical to young people's development and their contributions to the community; and the choice of institution is as critical as the choice of activity. This will further help to understand youths and their potentials within their worlds rather than seeing them as problems to their communities and agents of social vices. It would also help government to plan better to accommodate the needs of the youth for constructive leisure activities.

Note

1. This is the trade name of a cable Television network which provides access to virtually all available television stations across the globe through subscription.

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