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### **Television viewing in public places: Identity construction and evolving urban spaces in metropolises in Ghana**

#### **Abstract**

*This study engages a millennial public sphere activity in Africa- the viewing of television in free access public places- and the performances that characterise, promote and sustain audience viewership within such spaces. The study contends that while viewing of television in public places is not a new phenomenon, the advent of new media and its ancillary satellite and pay-tv programs coupled with a newer constitution of quilted audiences transcendental of class, gender and demography have provided novel spaces for the emergence of popular performances and new identity formations that are yet to be studied. Using identity construction theory and through an ethnographic approach founded on series of in-depth interviews and participant observations of viewership of three popular television programmes- Telenovela, English Premier League, and Nollywood movies, the study argues that the increasing ubiquitous nature of these arenas in the metropolises have become new spaces for identity construction.*

#### **Introduction**

Television has always played a prominent role in the daily lives and social processes of communities. For several decades television's influence over culture had been located at micro level within the community- the home. The presence of television in homes always gave the false semblance of it being a domestic private commodity available only to the privileged few who used its influencing effect to initiate social change (Johnson, 2001; Scrase, 2002). This is notwithstanding the fact that within the domestic space television's privacy connotation has regularly been contradicted by the atmosphere that characterises its viewership. In several homes, especially in Africa, owners of television regularly bring their television sets into open spaces for interested members of the community to share in the viewing experience. Even where its monument symbol guarantees a kind of immobility from a particular room or location, interested community members could still be ushered into that private space to enjoy the viewing experience.

Over the last decade, global and transnational cultures have all led to a booming increase in access to television acquisition and viewership. Particularly in Africa, new consumer tastes, urbanisation, technology infiltration, roll out of digital and satellite television, pay TV franchise, new programming and content developments have initiated Afrocentric shows. In addition, new distribution opportunities and outlets have all catapulted television access and viewership to high levels. From about 10 million households that had television sets in the last decade of the twentieth century, African now has an estimated 42 million households with access to television (Marszalek, 2013). This figure excludes television sets with corporate or public ownership. In Ghana, television programming which used to be the monopoly of government through its major broadcaster, Ghana Television (GTV) and its one channel of broadcast has been crushed with several new private broadcasters entering the terrain. This has led to a mushrooming (by Ghanaian and African standards) of television broadcast stations that bring to viewers interesting and addictive programmes on sports, entertainment, and news programmes. Through pay television, Ghanaians have access to interesting networks such as Multi Choice, DSTV, and other digital broadcast channels from across the globe that are 'pleasant and gratifying' (Salzman, 1993, p. 3). Whilst this new trend continues to manifest,

audiences attachment to television as a legitimating stamp on urban and cosmopolitan modeling, cultural acquisitions, and inclusiveness in global and transitional culture have led to the incorporation of television viewing as part of the daily life of the urban citizen. As such citizens who do not have immediate access to television as a commodity in the domestic space or who seek to experience the character of television as a gathering place must seek the gratification of this need from available domestic spaces that would welcome them; or from the emerging spaces that traverse many urban locations, annexed to the bars and restaurants where television is beamed on giant screens in open public spaces.

The study of television as an influential factor in the culture and discourses of people is well documented (Adams, 1992; Johnson, 2001; McElory & Williams, 2010; Rao, 1966; Salzman, 1993; Singhal & Rogers 1996; Speck & Roy 2008). Such cultural ramifications arising out of television influence include its relevance as: a place and nucleus where interaction among people may occur and where "ideas, values and shared experiences may be constructed and a monument that allows people to rise above what is local and survey the global arena from an omniscient position" (Adams, 1992, p. 118); an ubiquitous commodity that acts as a catalyst for materialism and consumption predicated on capitalist tendencies (Schiller, 1989); a medium that can be used to project ethnic and class identity formations (Hermes, 2005); imagination of children's idyllic universe (Lustyik, 2010); a promoter of urban modeling and consumerist behavior and legitimates urban lifestyles, nuances and norms (Johnson, 2001). Liebes and Katz (1988), Lull 1988 and Morley (1988) have also documented how different cultural groups show different attitudes towards television viewing.

#### **Purpose of study**

There is an abundance of empirical research on television viewing (Adams, 1992; Johnson, 2001; McElory & Williams, 2010; Rao, 1966; Salzman, 1993; Speck & Roy 2008). However, these studies, especially in postcolonial territories, have mostly concentrated on the medium's presence as a place of communal gathering; as a modernizing influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the post-colonial subject; and as a capitalist consumerist product (Adams, 1992; Hermes, 2005; Liebes & Katz, 1988; Lustyik, 2010). All the studies indicate how social practices are created during the television viewing process.

This study delves into a new realm and examines contemporary utilisation of television as a product that can draw people to new spaces in the metropolis. The study argues that television viewing in free access open spaces in post colonial cultures of developing economies is yet to be investigated. The paper further contends that peoples attitude and recourse to viewing television in open places, especially as a twenty-first century culture, create new ways of participation in public arenas that must be understood from an ethnographic perspective. Once a phenomenon magnetizes individual to a common assembly ground, a "unique opportunity to explore the shaping of meaning and interpretation that such actors may perform" (McElory & Williams, 2010, p. 196) in the centers of congregation becomes imperative. This work therefore offers insights into the individual and aggregate behaviours, views, experiences and performances of the congregants within this new cultural space. Second, this study moves from an earlier empirical approach of studying the characters within the contents of television programme. In particular, the study extends the empirical fact that television is a gathering place for several individuals and groups, there is therefore the need to further investigate the kind of performances and discourses engaged by social actors within the new space. Finally, I make the argument that though the object of attraction to the public arena is television viewing, upon the gathering of the people, the viewing may become an ancillary activity compared to the other performances that the audiences engage in to define their presence. I stress that the activities and behaviours that go on in these sites are broad, traversing several important discourses beyond television viewing.

In the attempt to investigate the gravitation of television viewing congregants to these free access public spaces to engage the medium, two major research questions became imperative: 1) How do

audiences rationalise their choice of such sites for television viewing and what performances do they engage in at these public sites?; 2) How do identity formations emerge at these sites?

### **Identity formation as social construction**

The discourse on identity theories has in recent studies been cast in constructivist perspective. This perspective asserts that identity construction is not static but arises out of social settings (Fishman, 1989; Martin-Barbero, 2002; Butcholz & Hull, 2005) and through discursive practices and constructions (Baker, 1999; De Fina, Sciffrin & Bamberg, 2006). With the onset of globalization, immigration and transnational cultures, identity theory has assumed a more significant role in research on spaces where new or hybrid identities are being forged. The constructivist perspective provides grounds for the imagination of identity formation as a subjective construct. A person's individual or group identity is so fluid that movement between different cultures can engender new identity formation. Stuart Hall's own postulations on the easily shattering nature of identity indicate that with the fragmentation of the culture and all that encompasses it, identity formation has assumed the dimension of having multiplications of referents (Martin-Barbero, 2002). Significantly, newer and more fragmented sites of subject-formation are emerging giving new meanings and interpretation to what hitherto had been the solid states of identity theories on race, ethnicity, gender, class, and nationality. It is important to note that with the pace at which globalization is inscribing its emblem on local and transnational cultures, the volatility of identity formations is being accelerated. What had heretofore been seen in local environment as the specificity of identity has now been transformed to become something alien or undomesticated, at best a hybridized cultural product yet to be classified.

Butcholz and Hall (2005) submit five principles on identity theory discourse. These include 1) the *emerging* principle which they sum up as follows:

Identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon. (p. 588).

This is an indication that cultural identity is produced as social actors appropriate dialogue, voices, action, and texts within the cultural realm to articulate and assert their new identities. People constitute their identities through discourse; through interaction; and, through social action and language.

The second indicator which they categorize as *positionality* principle centers on the premise that:

Identities encompass (a) macro-level demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles. (p. 592)

In trying to categorize identities for themselves, language users would rather configure their identities within the linguistic environment in which they find themselves by articulating a language of conformity to induce acceptance or a language of discordance to indicate difference. In other words, within a single social action or interaction multiple identities can occur based on the position one wants to assert or articulate. Therefore, in the positionality principle, several multiple layers of social and linguistic concerns become imperative in deciding and concluding on how identity manifests.

The third indicator is labeled the *indexicality* principle. According to Buchholtz and Hall (2005), with *indexicality*,

Identity relations emerge in interaction through several related indexical processes, including: (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels; (b) implicatures and presuppositions regarding one's own or others' identity position; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles; and

(d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups. (p. 594)

This looks at the very mechanism or the means through which any kind of identity is constructed. For example, if an identity has been formed through a process of naming, in what context did the naming process emerge? Or by which mechanism did the identity become constructed? How has the identity been indexed as an outcome of linguistically induced relational and interactional processes? Indexicality, therefore, functions as socially endowed ideological structures or apparatuses: norms, values, beliefs and cultures of the society and for that reason any identity that emerges or is forged must for the essence of identity comprehension and cohesion be rooted in the culture of the people and can only be meaningful in such social contexts. Society, encompassing all its norms, beliefs and values, is the mechanism through which identity becomes indexed.

The fourth principle is termed *relationality*. This principle states,

Identities are intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy.

Identities, whether existing, emerging, or forged do not enjoy any form of autonomy from other forms of identities. Identities are formed in relation to other known or available identity configurations or positions. Identity formation derives its unique categorization not from sameness or difference but from the ever dynamic but changing positions through its relational encounters with other available identities. It is within a framework of interaction with other available identities and relations that new or a reiteration of existing identities become authenticated or authorized. In other words, identity formation is a product of intersubjectivity and, as such, its adequacy, legitimacy, coherence, and distinction can only be understood or acknowledged through its juxtaposition with other entities-identity formations. Through such marked juxtapositions, an identity may produce or reproduce itself in a variety of ways “to underscore the point that identities are never autonomous or independent but always acquire social meaning in relation to other available identity positions and other social actors” (p.598).

The *partialness* principle, the fifth of the identity principles espoused by Buchholtz and Hall (2005) is hinged on the idea that,

Any given construction of identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part habitual and hence often less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation and contestation, in part an outcome of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an effect of larger ideological processes and material structures that may become relevant to interaction. It is therefore constantly shifting both as interaction unfolds and across discourse contexts. (p. 606).

From the above statement, it can be asserted that the relationality of identity as explained under the preceding principle can invariably, account for its partiality. Since as indicated earlier, identity can take variety of forms through the relationality principle, any description of what that identity is will depend not on the full observation or knowledge of the phenomenon but only on its fractional aspect. Else how do we account for the varying identity formation of a single phenomenon if we know the totality of its configuration? The partiality principle rests on the assumption that all identities are derived from “partial accounts” (p. 606) of their configuration. Any claim to how an identity has come into being, like the ethnographic or phenomenological accounts of any culture, is rested on the representation of part of the existing culture. Identities formation then becomes contextual because only fractional accounts of its entire nature can be rendered at any given moment.

The principles, together, seem to compartmentalise the discourse on identity theory. What these principles seek to enunciate is a generation of a new discourse that would interrogate identity

development as a phenomenon that arises out of interaction and negotiation through language and culture.

This study follows these footprints and contends that identity developments and formations that announce themselves in the new cultural sites of public television viewing are not given but negotiated through interactional processes.

### **Methodology**

The aim of this research is to investigate the rationale for people congregating in open spaces to view television and the social constructions that emerge in such places. This study is approached from the qualitative perspective and generates data by employing participant observation and in-depth interviews with social actors at the sites of investigation. The approach is also ethnographic because regular visits to the four sites chosen for the study allowed the researcher to engage in the phenomenon of 'immersion'- an essential ingredient of ethnographic approach (Lindlof & Taylor 2002). According to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995, p. 2)

The ethnographer seeks a deeper immersion in others world in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important. With immersion the field worker sees from inside how people lead their lives...what they find meaningful and how they do so... Immersion enables the fieldworker to directly and forcibly experience for herself both the ordinary routines and conditions under which people conduct their lives and the constraints and pressures to which such living is subject.

The ethnographic approach also allowed me to engage in prolonged and intense participation by routinely watching television in selected public places in order to explore the complexity of social relationships that go on within the sites (Johnson, 2001; Scrase, 2002). Furthermore, most studies that have been done on the role of television in the lives of people in several diverse economies and regions have approached the phenomenon from the qualitative and ethnographic perspective (Adams, 1992; Johnson 2001; Scrase, 2002; Lutsyik, 2010; McElroy & Williams, 2010). I chose to pursue similar approach precedent in the literature and state that because television has become emblematic in the daily lives of the people being studied, only an ethnographic design can help unlock the hidden values and nuances that characterize viewership in general and, in particular, performances that occur in these free access-open public spaces.

Data for this study was collected over a period eight months spanning February 2013 to September 2013. Four key sites with free-access public viewing activity located within two metropolises were selected for the study. The two metropolises, about 35 kilometers apart, are the coastal cities of Winneba and Kasoa in the Central Region of Ghana. Whereas Kasoa is a burgeoning bustling city with vibrant activities, whose ever increasing population seems to be breaking its seams, Winneba enjoys its metropolis status mostly as a college city inhabiting Ghana's foremost teacher training university, The University of Education. The four sites chosen for the study (two from each metropolis) included three free-access sites that serve as annexes to specific restaurants and bars, and an on-campus site operated by the Junior Common Room members (students) on the North Campus of the university.

The rationale behind the purposive selection of these sites was based on three important points. First, each site typified the expected or normative social rules and behaviours that characterise viewing of television in public places and, in addition ensured, "maximised variation of settings, programme content and viewership" (Lindlof & Taylor 2002, p. 127). Second, the sites presented themselves as easily accessible- for their physical location and proximity, as well as the readiness of the social actors to grant me audience for interviews, especially during the exploratory stages of negotiating access to the sites. It was very refreshing to note that participants positively responded to being recorded and most of the time asked to hear their voices on the recorder through a playback. Finally, employing

participant observation instrument sometimes demand that the researcher observes the phenomenon of action in a less obtrusive manner to allow for some degree of measuring the after-life of participation in the form of continued interest in the programmes' (McElroy & Williams, 2010). By following this approach I was able to collect additional data through several periods of unobtrusive observation. I also engaged in interactions with participants and was intrigued by the readiness and willingness of several participants to be encumbered with evaluations of their perceptions and performances on events and incidents captured on several of these evenings. These evaluations allowed me to look at events and incidents with renewed perspective regularly adjusting my prior views and reorienting myself toward the site of data collection and my social actors in a form of reflexivity.

All observations were done in the evening. I routinely scheduled my visits to specifically sync with the telecast of unique programmes that draw patrons to the sites. My field notes tracking indicated 54 visits were variously made to the sites within the data collection period. The length of each visit depended on the programmes being telecast. Most of the programmes that drew huge crowds were soccer matches, mostly the European Cup and the English Premier League. This was followed by the telenovelas and Nollywood movies. There were 35 formal interviews that lasted an average of 25 minutes and several informal interviews all of which were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated. Most of the interviews were conducted in vernacular using *Twi* (the widely spoken dialect in Ghana) and translations done with support from the two faculty members from the Department of Ghanaian Languages at the University of Education, Winneba. Others interviews were done in English for research participants who had a good command and comprehension of the English language.

Emergent groups come into being relatively spontaneously where people find themselves together in the same place, or where the same collection of people gradually come to know each other through conversation and interaction over a period of time, (Cartwright & Zander, 1968). Though the social actors may come from different places, as soon as they converge to watch television in such public place, profound social intercourse with its positive social value emerges.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This study was based on two main lines of inquiry: how do audiences rationalise their choice of such sites for television viewing and what are the performances that come with the viewing? Second, how do identity formations emerge at these sites?

In response to the first issue of inquiry, research participants shared several different perspectives on the motivation that drew them to the site of study. Several of the catalysing factors went beyond the act of television viewing. While television plays a significant role in bringing participants together, its sole importance as a mobilising agent for congregation to the arena could only be utterances of new audiences or few regular members. Indeed for regular visitors to these sites, television as the overdriving mobilizing agent ceases, upon such several visits, shifting its initial power to an ancillary mode. People's motivation for participation was caused by several other issues. First is the nature of discourse that transpires within the arena. After several of my ethnographic visits, I was awed by the fact that regular visitors were more hooked to discussions on critical insights into popular discourses that became the hub of interaction. At the center of the interaction were debates on politics, Brazilian telenovellas, African music videos and Nollywood movies. Politics normally took the center stage. On most occasions the main programme that was assumed to have brought people to the site suffered relegation during interaction.

To have enough time to adequately deal with any such discussion, research participants would normally arrive early to continue an old topic that was not exhausted, or initiate a new one. Sometimes too, the discussion would continue after a major television programme that was assumed to have brought people to the gathering was over. The wait in between discussion, symbolised in the screening of the main programme, was like an unending pause in a face-to-face interaction. During

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pre-viewing or post-viewing discussions, participants rarely digressed into the contents of the main television programme that has drawn audiences to the sites. The energy and zeal with which participants engaged the subject of politics; and, the music and movies underscored the sense of immediacy and priority participants attached to those issues. On one occasion when I had gone to collect data during the telecast of an European Championship match, I asked some participants why they were chatting about other issues when the main programme was on. One responded:

*When we come here, we meet all sorts of people. We argue a lot, have fun and socialize. You know working from morning till evening is not easy so this is one of the social platforms we have to fraternize with ourselves...*

Another responded in a similar manner:

*That is the beauty of the game. We don't come here to listen to the commentary or even fully watch the game being played. We come here to make analysis of the game. In fact, we do not even mind turning off the volume of the television. We just have fun, chat with each other and socialize whilst gathered in this place.*

In this scenario, participants' appreciation of the sites is founded on the personal interactive benefits provided by the site and not the giant screen that beckons people to the space.

Another imperative gathered from participant was a rationalisation of the venue as a site for middle class imagination. Despite the proliferation of pay and satellite television, many citizens still feel like outcasts relative to their inability to afford monthly subscriptions to these pay TV channels. Indeed, the acquisition of pay TV, in the minds of the people, symbolises a rise to the middle class or elite status. In these public viewing places, viewers have the chance of freely watching all the programmes aired on the pay TV network and satellite stations (of course with the caveat that programme control is in the hands of the owners of the site). Therefore, for the poor citizen who is unable to subscribe to pay TV, a visit to the site is a sure reason for middle class imagination. In an interview, one of my informants remarked:

*I don't have DSTV but here I can stay all night and watch the various international programmes being shown. Of course I don't have the benefit of deciding which programme I want but I don't lack discussions of those that I have watched when I meet people discussing the programme. This time, thanks to these places, DSTV is not the exclusive property of the rich. We are all the same.*

Television is fast saturating several communities in Ghana. For the urban centers in particular, owning pay TV is becoming the norm. In the above response, the site's transformational power in the life and mind of the underclass citizen is articulated. The psychological sense of imaging one's self as a middle class citizen through regular access to pay TV has its own positive transformational yield for those caught within the lower class web. The sites also function as arenas where commerce can become a congregating agent. Since all the sites are annexes to restaurants and bars, the arenas also become energized commercial hubs where commodities are displayed and purchased through systems of disguises and veiled enforcements. To this end TV viewing becomes an auxiliary object for attracting consumers to the object of sale.

Two types of commercial activities were documented: the sale of consumables and commercial sex work. Unquestionably, the free viewing sites availed prospective buyers are also apron-stringed to the sale of consumer goods. The unwritten rules and codes of participating at the site is a testimony of the commerce rationale. At every site a few seats are provided for those with the capital to buy products. Sitting on a seat signified an invitation to be served; or upon your being seated, a probing gaze from bar attendants would be indicative of your voluntary request for service. Like the contents on giant

television screen, the products on sale, symbolically, have transnational character: Hunters Beer from South Africa, continental dishes whose origin always transcended African boundaries, Asian and American cuisines including, hamburgers, fried potato chips, barbecued sausages and others. Added to these consumptive activities was that of the commercial sex workers and their customers whose presence in the arena was purely business and not television viewing. One commercial sex worker had this to say:

*My motivation for coming here is purely business. I pick my clients here. Am not here because of the Nollywood movies. I come here every evening whether the giant screen is erected or not. This is my business territory.*

The kind of relentless drive to use the television arena as a means to expand commitment to profit enjoyed an overriding locus relative to the television viewing activity. However, this revelation only remained veiled, becoming apparent only after one had arrived at the site and taken a professional observation of events.

The positive influence of pay television on individual access to television has been so pervasive that the old communalist attitude that characterised television viewing as a place of gathering in domestic spaces is fast losing its pace. As a gathering place, television reinforced existing communal practice of doing things in communion with one another. In the past, only few people in the society could afford television. Yet they invited people into their domestic space to share in the experience because it was right to do so. But with the proliferation of digital television, several individuals who used to move to other people homes to watch television have retreated back to their own domestic space to enjoy the fantasy of the medium. They have assumed new social status owners of satellite of pay TV. For some of my participants, television has deeply infiltrated the daily life of the urban citizen, and its easy acquisition, affordability and access has eroded the symbolic cultural practice of bringing people from different parts of the community into a private domestic space. It is the nostalgia for the old way of television viewing that seems to motivate several people to the open public space. One participant shared the concern and experience of several other participants:

*I have TV at home but there is more fun coming out here and meeting these new people and sharing in the excitement and enjoyment together. For example, just look at the English Premier league or if you are watching the Nigerian movies. Can you enjoy watching these alone? I don't think so. You need company. You need other people. Sometimes even in your own home your family members may not be fanatics of the programme you love watching and you are all alone watching it. This place is the ideal place for watching TV and I love it when am here. I have made some new friends and we are like a family already.*

This research participant bemoans the erosion of that culture that had been part of the coming of television in several African homes and communities and the consequential void that is being created in the lives of several individuals who love watching television in groups and communions. For these individuals the new sites of public viewing fills the void.

On the second line of inquiry, the study asked, how do identity formations emerge at these sites? Interactions with research participants revealed that the new spaces had facilitated new group and identity formations that seem to permeate all the sites of viewership. Much of the data and in-depth interviews with research participants confirmed the epistemological position of identify creation and formation as an “emerging product...socially and culturally constructed” (Hatoss, 2012, p. 49). Taking the fluidity and social constructivist perspective (Martin-Barbero, 2002; Scrase, 2002; Butcholz & Hall, 2005) this study notes that two major forms of identity formations had emerged at the sites: the personal identity and the group identity.



Regarding the personal identity formation, participants are accorded a class or social status based on the individual economic performance at the site. For example, as discussed earlier, it was observed from all the sites that empty seats that are placed on the viewing grounds are reserved for middle class status participants whose class identity had been formed in the minds of the congregants through their ability to purchase food and drinks on regular basis. Their identity as formed on the grounds was based on the show of economic power within that micro space. On arrival at the grounds these individuals are saluted with common Ghanaian reverential titles for the elite or upper class citizens- 'Boss', 'Chief', 'Officer', 'Nana' and many others. An attendant indicated that most of the people who came to watch the free television could not afford to buy drinks nor food. Therefore, it was important to isolate the few who could afford and treat them differently. The owner of one of the sites stated: "how else would the others have been able to watch the television free had it not been these special patrons. We need to stay in business and they are the ones that keep us in business". Butcholz and Hall (2005, p. 606) assert in the partialness principle of identity formation that such an act can be "in part deliberate and intentional...in part an outcome of others perception and representations". Some of the 'special patrons' seem to revel in the new exalting and imagined identity formed and were ready to live up to its sustenance and maintenance through regular patronage and show of economic power.

Group identity formations were also rife at all the sites manifesting in the form classification labels. They came in the form of affiliations: club (as in soccer); gender (particularized for the women participants); political; ethnic; queer; disability; and, identification on the basis of stance on particular recurring discourse. Whilst many of the participants at the sites lived in pre-site locales as solid social individuals, the site provided them with "multiplications of referents through which subjects came to identify themselves" (Barbero, 2002, p. 625). Whatever identity participants had prior to their attendance at the grounds had been added unto through an affiliation or identification with one group or the other. The mark of this new group identity manifested through several signs and significations on the site: the common chants of the football club (such as the Manchester United FC) songs and the accompanying club paraphernalia that adorn and unify the fans. A research participant had this to say:

*In this place I belong to the Man U family. I have brother and sisters here and we have a common anthem, anytime we come to watch them play, we may not wear red but we can sing in unison and hold hands. That sense of brotherliness drives me crazy. I know my Man U family members gathered here also feel the same.*

An exacting sense of fanaticism permeates the sites relative to identify formations. Identities fashioned on the symbol of a brotherhood underlines the sustainability such groups within the sites.

Data was also collected women participants' overt display of group affiliation through sustained common identification with female characters in Brazilian soap or Nollywood movie, who suffer physical and psychological abuse, or the handsome playboy with a fatalistic touch who, nevertheless, becomes every woman's dream. One interviewee who described herself as an addict to the soaps and movies remarked that the close relationship that had developed among the female patrons of the site was rather unconscious but had gradually manifested into a women group with a common viewing perspective, agenda, and resistance. According to her, many of the female patrons came to watch the soap operas in that open space so they could share their emotions with other viewers. However, since most of the patrons of the Brazilian soaps were mostly women, a sisterhood unit had been created unconsciously. They also indicated that, to foster a sustained nourishment of their feminine needs, the new identity bonds forged in the sites have moved beyond the present sites to other realms.

The sign language use attributable to the persons with impaired hearing or vision was regularly revealed as an identity symbol at all the sites. During one such viewing occasion, I observed some four young men huddled in corner of a site. I walked over and tried to engage them in a conversation. Before I could make any utterance, a participant at the site waved me over and said at the top of his voice "they can't hear you, they are deaf and dumb." It was an intervention that brought home the

reality that identity formation was regularly and sometimes consciously being forged at the sites. The phenomenon of identity formation had shown its dynamism to include marginalized groups transferring and reinforcing their quest for identity recognition from mainstream social groups to the micro public television viewing spots. In the new space, these marginalised groups such as gays and persons with conditions of disability established their presence through symbols of communication or through some form of identification with participants who shared their marginalised narratives.

These identity formations, one might argue, might suffer spatial temporality in that once patrons exit the arena of television viewing such formation sees a dissolution. However, in tandem with Scrase (2002, p. 330) position that “identity formation is now seen as processual: a fluid process based on one's own lived realities or formed in one's imagination”, this study contends that while such position can be true, since identity is shaped through interactions and can therefore be habitual, intentional or conscious, through interactional processes, and based on one's 'lived realities', the on-site-identities developed are not limited in space. In fact, evidence from research participants showed that several of the group formations forged from the sites have been transited to other spaces for the benefit of in-group members.

### **Conclusion**

The study set out to interrogate a new phenomenon in metropolises in Ghana- the public viewing of television in open places. It was pivoted on two main objectives: first, to interrogate the motivation for the urban citizen's decisions to seek viewership in such spaces and the performances that characterise such viewership; and second, to study the dynamics of identity formations that became engendered in the sites. The study revealed that motivation for participation were multiple and varying. The study also indicates that the fluidity of identity theory underpinned several cultural performances that emerged in this cultural space. In sum, the study asserts that though television continues to shape the social processes, its movement into new spaces aided by digital and satellite technologies is also creating avenues for new cultural formations and identities. The public viewing of television in such arenas promotes the formation or reinforcement of identity groups and supports the assertion that identity formation is not a “tidy natural science construct, but rather a subjective cultural construct” (Fishman 1989, p. 6). Therefore, the dynamics of identity formations arising out of self or group ascriptions ensure that routine interactions that occur at the public television viewing sites provide opportunities for fresher emerging identity formations to be developed and negotiated.

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