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Oral narrative extension of sportmedia: an experience with an English premier league soccer audience community in Eldoret, Kenya

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This article is based on a cultural practice that has developed in the context of the interaction between Eldoret-based audiences of European football with the television medium through which they access this football. It is a practice that I will refer to here as the oral narrative extension of media. I describe and interpret it in the light of two conceptual frames; media practice theory and oral narrative performance. Two main arguments are developed. First, that the *electronic reconfiguration* of Eldoret-based fans of European fans of European football is not a closed event of mediation but rather an open-ended practice that provokes the *artistic figuration and re-viewing and metaphoric coherence* that constitutes extended narratives which create a *mediaworld*. Secondly, that this narratively performed mediaworld demonstrates the artistic process of individual performers and dynamic contexts (in)forming their performances.

Introduction

Apparently, there is a distinct audience community of English Premier League soccer based in Eldoret, a small township in the Western region of Kenya. They spend lots of their time talking about soccer and have seemingly found a way of accommodating it within the schedules of their daily lives. In this sense, English Premier League soccer is one part of their life. Nevertheless, it is argued here that the soccer talk stands out from other conversations in its immediate contexts in at least two important ways. First, its subject matter is distinctively external to the immediate sociocultural realities of the participants. Secondly, the otherwise ordinary conversational format is infused with oral narrative techniques that elevate such it to a level favourably comparable to oral narrative performance. But this line of thinking goes counter to, and is therefore in my view an interrogation of, the argument that television mediation of European soccer to Sub-Saharan Africa-based audiences is a form of media imperialism.

It is a discourse that has been developed by, among others, Akindes and Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale.¹ Akindes has perceived the Francophone Africa television audiencing of French soccer as ‘French electronic colonialism of Francophone Africa’.² Omobowale compares the Nigerian audiences’ attachment to Nigerian soccer on the one hand and the English Premier League soccer on the other. He observes that as the Nigerian audience is exposed to global trends in the

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world of soccer, ‘they are momentarily brought to the fore of western culture which is apparently seen as superior’.³

However, I shall argue that there is another set of discourses that counters this argument. Solomon Waliaula has argued that in the process of electronic mediation of the English Premier League football in Kenya, audiences construct context specific narratives that enable them not only to see the match but also to engage with the whole gamut of their real-life experiences.⁴ Godwin Siundu has also commented on this subject of the Kenyan audiencing of the English Premier League and observes that in the Kenyan context, football has for a long time been appropriated and exploited for a number of potential returns by different groups. He identifies the social construction of identity as one of the main functions that soccer has played in Kenya even before the introduction of the English Premier League soccer in Kenya.⁵

This argument is echoed by Richard Vokes⁶ in the context of rural Uganda, and Olaoluwa and Adejayan⁷ in the case of south-western Nigeria. Vokes significantly links the communal audience reception practices, and the social practices activated in the process. He observes that in Bugamba, satellite television mirrors the earlier history of radio, especially in its production of a communal viewing environment.⁸ Part of Vokes’ argument here seems to be that it is not necessarily the cultural content mediated by new media that counts but how the technology itself is adapted to the new context of reception. This view is echoed in Olaoluwa and Adejayan’s study of the English Premier League audience practices in south-west Nigeria states of Oyo and Osun. The authors observe that the consumption traits of English Premier League soccer in these places should not be just perceived in terms of the – cultural – meanings that are read to emanate from the viewing, ‘but should also be seen as ramifying the new meanings and understanding which obtains from the cultural infections of spectators and fans’.

In their view, part of the contextual cultural resources that have influenced the production of new meanings out of the English Premier League soccer is the Nollywood video-film practice in Nigeria. It is a practice that has evolved communal metaphors which the audiences insert into their audiencing practice of the English Premier League soccer matches. They zero in on one of these metaphors, *the igwe* and demonstrate how this Igbo title of chieftaincy has been used as a frame within which to interpret Thierry Henry’s – one of Arsenal’s most famous players – soccer prowess in a way that adapts it to their immediate sociocultural context. In my view, Olaoluwa and Adejayan’s study, at least in one sense, can be seen as an investigation of the reconfiguration of ‘imported’ cultural products right from that space where one would have imagined that they are safest; at the point of reception. The two authors describe this thus, ‘with respect to the experience of soccer fandom in Nigeria, as far as the British Premier League clubs are concerned, what is at display is not just the arbitrariness of fandom; it is what we have termed as the ‘audacity of fandom’.⁹

I consider my article as an extension of this perspective to English Premier League soccer; *audacious transfer* of the audience reception experience from television-centric space to the open field of oral performance. In this regard, a number of concepts are used in a special way to service the argument. These are *electronic reconfiguration* of sport media audiences and *oral narrative extension and contestations of media* as audience reception strategies.

Electronic media audience as mediated fans and then performers

When a Kenyan living in the modest town of Eldoret identifies himself as a fan of a European soccer club, albeit using the television as his main medium, he could be defined as a mediated or electronic fan.¹⁰ This is a fan that is produced in the experience of being a member of what David Rowe has termed the mediated audience of sport events.¹¹ However, this article problematizes Rowe's argument by proposing that membership to this audience community is only in part a social construction; it is also inspired by individual oral performance potential and capacity to attract and sustain audiences; to this extent the audiencing experience is imbued with agency.

The article argues that evidence of the significance of the audience's agency is in their capacity to extend their audience reception beyond the actual moments of reception. This extended audiencing is a sort of re-imagination of the soccer matches. One can also argue that in the process they also conjure a world in which the English Premier League soccer texts are inserted and narratively reconstructed. In this sense, these narratives can be understood as both a reflection and refraction of what is viewed in the bounded spaces of sport media television. This process creates what Gregory Bateson has referred to as storyworlds, which he describes as covering both factual and fictional realms, 'meaning stories told as true of the real world and stories that create their own imaginary world'.¹²

These extended narratives of audience reception experiences could also be understood as a form of *re-viewing*. This is a term whose use here to refer to a sort of second viewing but is influenced by Shawn Shimpach's concept of viewing as an activity that is not closed and bounded but that can be replayed and that also has echoes.¹³ In this sense, the soccer talk can be perceived as extended viewing, but that is accomplished away from the actual medium; the television. Thus, it can be argued the new medium here are the audience themselves as they engage in oral performance.

In this light, the article argues that an investigation of the mechanisms that inform the sport television-mediated audiences' response to sport media beyond the television room is a good medium to evaluate their efforts to reclaim, even if in part, their autonomy as real people with distinct identities that they perform in the context of media reception. This echoes Abercrombie and Longhurst's proposal that media audience research needs to:

Pay close attention to the agency and reflexivity of the people we call audience members, as they cope with the complexities of the media manifold ... an open-minded, practice based approach to whatever it is that people are doing with, or around, media ...¹⁴

Against this background this article tracks down the sport television-mediated audiences to their social space beyond the dominating influence of the televisual imagery and investigates how they use their own metaphors to engage with the worlds represented in the context of soccer mediation.

Research methodology

Research for this article proceeds on three levels, the first two of which are ethnographic and the last more inclined to literary stylistics. The first two are to mark out what is referred to in this study as the extended media narrative artists from the wider community of sport media audiences and secondly to identify the narrative spaces that they use and other structural details involved. To accomplish this, the

researcher taps on personal lived experience as a resident of Eldoret town for, at the time of fieldwork for this study, 14 years, and 7 years as a resident of Bondeni Estate, where this research is located. This can be understood in the light of what Debra Spitulnik has termed as the wide angled ethnographic approach to the study of media audiences that she describes thus,

In actuality, researchers might not move progressively and methodically into wider and wider arenas of context or practice, but they may move in several directions at once, and perhaps operate with differing intensities in different directions, depending on their interests, available opportunities, and what appears to be the fruitfulness of promise of the particular direction chosen.¹⁵

The fact that one can hear conversations on English Premier League soccer all over Eldoret town means that the study could have been situated in any place or, if possible, all over the place. However, my choice of the particular group at Bondeni is informed by what Spitulnik (above) terms *interest* and *available opportunity*. This study blends the ethnographic approaches to the study of media with the more literary-oriented qualitative methods of conceptualization, description and interpretation. As mentioned above, the study's third research interest is literary. Having heard many conversations by different speakers in Eldoret, the researcher noted an element of artistic flair in some of these conversations, and some of these speakers attracted others to become their audience. The researcher was also attracted to this kind of speakers and attended several sessions in different parts of town.

The research for this article zeroes in on one of the audience groups that, at the time of fieldwork, were resident in Bondeni, as was the researcher. These are individuals the researcher interacted with very frequently in the ordinary channels of life in Bondeni at the Barber shop, the abattoir, tailoring shops and Mpesa points¹⁶ at the West Indies Centre, and, at the video-shop-cum-football-viewing parlour popularly known as Patty's Place.¹⁷ Football talk was always part of the social interaction here. During this period, the researcher observed that one individual, Geoffrey Ogendi, but known by his nickname, Wenger, seemed to be the most compelling narrator. He is a supporter of Arsenal and because he considers himself, and projects the image of, an expert other members of this group refer to him as Wenger, which is the name of the long-serving manager of the English Premier League club Arsenal. In the evenings, or any time when he was free, he came over 'to talk' either at Fundi's place on the Verandah, on the bench outside a shopping store on the Main West Indies Building, or at outside Jera's Abbattoir.¹⁸ It is these spaces that, in my view, were the 'natural' performing spaces.

Having observed the performance patterns over time a focus group discussion was set, involving the researcher himself, Geoffrey, and three other participants identified by the latter. This specific performance was held inside a motel at the Bondeni National Petrol Station located about a hundred metres away from West Indies Centre, on a Sunday afternoon. The performance was relocated from its 'natural space' to take care of the literary purposes of the study; to audio record and closely observe the development of the sets of narrative that would be at play. The fluid entry and exit of participants in the 'natural' setting, the noises and other distractions would have made it difficult to achieve this objective. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the sampled focus group discussion-cum-oral performance session is not the only source of data for this article. I also tap of my lived experience and long-term passive and sometimes participant observation of the practice in Bondeni.

The extended oral performance

Introduction

It was a Sunday afternoon on the 6 December 2015, the Christmas season. The Premier League and Champions League football seasons were on course. The researcher had brought together Geoffrey Ogendi, Brian Onyango, Joshua Okoth and Sammy Mwangi, to a focused group discussion. At the time, Geoffrey was a 38-year-old Matatu¹⁹ driver and long-term fan of Arsenal. He is also a retired amateur soccer player, and the only one in the group that has had this experience. Brian Onyango was 27 year old and Geoffrey's assistant, a position popularly known as conductor.²⁰ He was also an Arsenal fan. Joshua Okoth was a 34 years old and worked at Paul's Bakery in Eldoret town. He was a Chelsea fan. Sammy Mwangi 28 years old worked as a Boda Boda rider²¹ and was an Arsenal fan. The trending theme in was the dwindling fortunes of Chelsea, which at that point in time was defending champion but among the bottom five clubs on the log.

Our talk set off with the *sad state of affairs at Chelsea*, with the group asking Joshua to account for the situation. The talk gradually picked up and moved in different directions, featuring all the participants. At some points, it was clearer, with only one speaker talking at a time, but in other situations, we had two or more speakers, somehow running into each other, or a speaker seemingly getting interrupted or *crowded out*. On the face of it, it sounded an ordinary conversation like any other on the other tables in the motel. But I argue that this talk also lends itself to a literary perspective of narrative structure and texture.

Performance structure

The session seemed to have just started arbitrarily, but in real sense there was a clear entry point that set the tone and also marked the fan identities of the members and their attitude towards the other teams. The previous evening, Chelsea had lost to Watford by a solitary goal that was scored near the end of the match. Geoffrey started off by making reference to this specific match thus,

Hiyo mpira niliacha kama ni nil nil. Sasa kuangalia, nakuja nashangaa, naona, 1–0, nashangaa kwani!

I left when the game was nil nil. Now watching it (later), I was surprised, I see, 1–0, am surprised!

The English translation does not capture the nuances of this remark both in its Kiswahili form and in the way it was delivered. First, it is apparent he was not following this match very closely, because he admits at some point he left and only came back later. When he remarked, *sasa kuangalia*, it could translate into an awkward phrase, 'now watching', but in real sense it plays into the concept of surprise, in this case only feigned, at the fact that Chelsea was losing. *Nashangaa kwani!* would, in a sensible English translation, translate to 'am surprised why did this happen!' It is actually an expression of disguised glee and it is also a jibe at Joshua, a challenge for him to defend *his team*. Indeed, what he seemed to be saying without saying was 'It made me happy that Chelsea lost the match'. Joshua took up the challenge:

Hata hivyo jana Chelsea ilicheza. Kupigwa walipigwa lakini walicheza.

All the same Chelsea played. They were beaten but they played.

In this example also the translation does not carry the same weight in English as it does in Kiswahili and with the nonverbal aspects of performance. It is actually repetitive and in a sense, redundant. Obviously Chelsea played in the match, and they lost. But what the remark could be read to mean is, 'Chelsea played very well and still lost'. Such a remark would then mean that Chelsea was not beaten. They just lost. This is well captured in the second statement, whose direct translation would even be more significant, but ungrammatical in English, 'Beaten, they were. But they played'. In the remark Joshua plays on a paradox of sorts. He accepts that Chelsea was beaten. But he still insists that they played (very well). The Swahili single word 'walicheza' semantically means 'they played' but its tonal quality in context meant, they played very well. In this way, Joshua seems to be saying, 'Chelsea did not lose, they were just beaten'. It is this paradox that Geoffrey picks up when he cuts him short and retorts, 'now you say you played and then you were beaten' and Joshua responded with a question, 'So you have never seen it happen?'

At this point another participant, Brian, remarked, 'It is true they are playing well, now ...' Seemingly having been emboldened by this supportive remark, Joshua added, 'You know we had 70% possession. Someone makes 30% and wins the match.' Geoffrey, apparently having shifted to Joshua's side, commented, 'It is comparable to Manchester United's failure to score'.

This quoted section highlights arguments that are made throughout this paper. First, that the sessions do not just start arbitrarily; there is always an establishment of what in formalist narrative theory is called the initial situation.²² Put simply, a set of circumstances that have an inherent imbalance and which set up a conflict that pits two antagonist sides. In this case, the initial situation seems to be that 'Chelsea is a big club but it is performing poorly'. The two contesting narratives are 'Chelsea is doomed' versus 'there is still hope'. Secondly, the narrative performance moves in the form of a contest for dominance, as is evident in Geoffrey and Joshua's apparent verbal duel. Thirdly, that in the contest for dominance the narrators employ various artistic strategies, for instance, Joshua uses clever word play to present Chelsea's loss in a way that vindicates the team. Fourth, that as the contest plays out in a dynamic process of alignment and realignment among the participants, and in fact sometimes it seems as if the contesting sides are in agreement.

Mapping a storyworld

Having started as a sort of verbal contest between Geoffrey and Joshua, the narrative extended beyond that specific match in which Chelsea lost to Watford to other directions that included other matches involving other teams and to other individual players and coaches beyond the ones at Chelsea. The narratives kept moving back and forth and, importantly, mapping a storyworld. In this storyworld, narratives reconstructed the media events that they were based on in ways that accommodated some factual details of what was mediated through television but that also allowed them to insert their imagination. We can trace one such movement from the point when Sammy, commenting on Diego Costa's role in the problems at Chelsea remarks, 'You know he has differed with Mourinho, you can even recall that match when he removed his warm-up kit and threw it away in anger'. What Sammy referred to is factual and was captured and relayed during the live mediation of a match – not the one they played against Watford. However, Geoffrey extends this narrative thus:

He warmed up, and warmed up and warmed up! So even if it is warm up, he warmed up the whole of the second half! You warm up and someone else from the bench is put in the game. Such a thing has once happened to (Carlos) Tevez. Tevez once warmed up for long and got so fed up that he told off (Sir Alex) Ferguson. Even at Man City too, didn't he warm up and actually differ with everyone?

This is an imaginative reconstruction that exaggerates the mediated account of the said events such that while they do not necessarily correspond to the 'true version' of what was mediated, it retains the narrative logic that works by way of building a scenario, characters and a plotline of the event.²³ Costa did not warm up the whole of the second half in the match referred to. Carlos Tevez never had such an experience (of warming up for too long and never getting the chance to play) at Manchester United. It was actually at a Champions League match between Manchester City and Bayern Munich that allegedly, Tevez declined to be used as a substitute. Nevertheless, the fictional account presented by Geoffrey artistically heightens the scenario, a conflict between a star player and his coach. It also builds Costa and Tevez as individuals with distinct traits of character and that make certain choices when they are caught up in the scenario of perceived frustration. The plotline is the same in each of the two scenarios; in the beginning, a coach and a player have differences, on the match day the coach frustrates the player, and the player responds through public display of anger.

In some instances, the narrativization of this mediated football does not even grow from factual details of specific matches but from a blend of rumour and the creative imagination of the narrators. In the process, scenarios are imagined and characters modelled to take the plot to a desired end. For instance, commenting on the situation at Chelsea, Geoffrey constructs this narrative:

Do you know how many players matter at Chelsea? (a dramatic pause of about three seconds, then he raises three fingers) Three. Hazard, Fabregas and Diego Costa. It is not that Mourinho is blindly keeping Diego Costa on the bench. He keeps Costa on the bench to hurt the team. He is trying to frustrate the midfield. Because to whom will they pass the ball? Because Fabregas is in that team to feed Diego Costa ... Hazard is in the team because of Diego Costa. So when he fields Hazard and Fabregas, without Diego Costa, it will force Hazard to hold the ball until he gets to the goal. Do you see that? ... You know Fabregas likes Mourinho. Mourinho is the one that saved him from his troubles at Barcelona ... So maybe he tells Fabregas 'do not play so well. This guy (Hazard) must go. Understand? This guy must go'. Then Diego Costa is also his player. So he puts him on the bench. So to whom will the passes go?

This narrative conjures a conspiracy between Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho and two of his players, Fabregas and Diego Costa, to frustrate one player, Eden Hazard, out of the club. The narrator fashions out of a coach and his player the character roles of protagonist and antagonist, and the two other players as supporting the one side against the other. Whereas this was a largely imaginary account of the goings on at the Chelsea football club at that point in time, it demonstrates the audience's creative power to insert 'fitting' detail into what they watch in order and also to respond to mediated soccer by way of narrative accounts. Seemingly a far-fetched conspiracy theory of sorts, the narrative quoted above fits within Jerome Bruner's view that 'narrative accounts ... centre upon people and their intentional states: their desires, beliefs, and so on, and they ... focus on how these intentional states led to certain kinds of activities'.²⁴ In this context, the audience demonstrates an amazing capacity to translate visual televisual imagery into their own mesh of probabilities supplied by their deep resources of imagination.

It is important to note that the performance of these narratives also morphs into a contest of creative imagination, with each aiming to leap higher than the rest. Because it is a spontaneous thing, each imaginative leap is vulnerable to deconstruction. The whole process is thus very dynamic. For instance, in the narrative quoted above, Geoffrey's interpreted Chelsea's failure to score as an intentional strategy by the coach to deny his team a striker, making it difficult for the rest of the players to score. But in response, Sammy argued thus, 'But you see Barcelona normally do not play with a recognized striker, at least before they signed Suarez'. But not to be outdone, Geoffrey responded by another narrative that was slightly *interrupted* by Joshua.

- Geoffrey: You see? Let me tell you a secret.
 Joshua: Barcelona's game, they don't play with a striker.
 Geoffrey: Barcelona do not want, do not want a striker. You see? Barcelona use wings and attacking midfielders. The rest fill up the midfield. You see how Wenger sets up his play? Wenger fills up only the midfield. In fact it is a winger that comes to play the striker role. Now Wenger is trying to bring in Giroud as a striker. He should not have brought him there, he has always used wings. You see like (Thierry) Henry was a winger; he was then brought to the centre.

The extract not only served to capture Geoffrey's attempt to restore the dominance of his narrative but also introduced a range of aspects of performance style. Geoffrey started by calling the attention of Sammy, his rival, in a compelling way, inviting him to see, and promising to tell him *a secret*. This is comparable to the dramatic technique known as *apostrophe*,²⁵ by which the performer establishes a desired type of connection with the audience. In this case, it was a seductive way of charming his challenger to his side, knowing very well that his argument was presumptively made and had not factored in well-known teams that set up their game without a recognized striker, such as Barcelona. He now had to cleverly extricate himself from *trouble*.

Secondly, Joshua, only a while back his challenger, had now realigned himself with him. He now played the role comparable to what Ruth Finnegan has called the answerer,²⁶ and Isidore Okpewho has termed as the accompanist.²⁷ This is a performance technique by which the oral narrator gets the support of a member of the audience that, during the performance, acts like an assistant. However, a notable difference in this case is the fact that this position is dynamic in performance. Contesting narratives continuously diverge and converge in ways that the performers do not stick to one narrative position.

The other oral technique used here is digression. But the way it works in this context is not in its typical sense of departure from the main story. Geoffrey does not move outside the story but, as in the case above seems to just want to use analogy to support his argument of the dominant-midfield style of soccer favoured by Barcelona. It struck me that this was a master stroke because Sammy, like Geoffrey, was an Arsenal fan and the choice of Arsenal as an analogy would most probably win him over. Secondly, this digression also worked like a narrative extension strategy – and there is lots of evidence in the rest of the performance – that allowed Geoffrey to move the narrative to a preferred direction and hence sustain his position as the dominant narrator.

In these narrative performances, digression is not just limited to the narrators telling stories about one match in relation to other matches. In most cases it involves the narrator attempting an imaginative envisioning of the matches in question, a form of live audio commentary of the matches, as is shown in Brian's narrative below:

There is a player they withdrew from the match; I do not know whom it is that Fellaini substituted. It is Fellaini that held together that midfield. Because when you look at Fellaini and then at Carzola, Carzola is short. And you know Fellaini actually directly challenges Coquelin, because they both play number eight. When Coquelin tackled for the ball, it was very easy for Carzola; you know Carzola is much faster. So he had overwhelmed Schweinsteiger, who is much slower ... so in my view Fellaini is good. The second half was dominated by Manchester United. Because after Fellaini had been introduced, Depay and Martial could now play well.

This was a counter narrative made in response to the one earlier made by Geoffrey's about Michael Carrick, a Manchester player at that time, that in his view was the only good midfielder in the club. Brian countered this view by recalling and envisioning the performance of Fellaini in a previous match between Manchester United and Arsenal.

As in a typical oral performance session, the narrator moderates his performance in response to audience feedback. In this case, Brian noted that his narrative presentation of Fellaini, as a good player, has been well received by the audience through their attentive posture and nodding of their heads and it motivated him to move on, this time presenting what he believed was the main problem at Manchester United, 'So Manchester United, it is just that the coach gambles a lot with the line-up. But currently, Manchester United is in good form ...' Geoffrey responded to this thus, 'according to me, the way you have talked, it is not bad. But this Manchester, they still need Carrick'. In this case, Geoffrey came in posing as an authority, and here also played the accompanist role in an oral performance.

It was also evident that these participants had distinct narrative performance styles and we could do a comparison between two, Geoffrey and Brian. Geoffrey, as noted earlier, preferred digression, which was mainly to other players, coaches, matches and scenarios well beyond the present. He also prefers to use vivid description to envision soccer matches. For example, commenting on the playing style of Leicester City, he observed:

I am not sure the Premier League teams have noted the tactics that Leicester City has been using ... when the ball is played to Vardy, he is always facing the opponent, you see the way we are facing each other? That pass is hard. Do you hear? You know he does not turn with that ball. You know what he does? He normally taps that ball back as he turns round. And because the defender is caught still facing him, the ball is passed ahead and Vardy sprints towards goal.

This narrative strategy worked through the imaginative recreation of a live soccer game. It could be argued that Geoffrey used this technique because, being a former player, he considered himself most qualified to talk about technical aspects of soccer. Brian as noted above used memory to recall details of past matches. He was more of an *encyclopedic narrator*.

You know, Martial is a very good player. Do you know what position he was playing in Monaco? He was a striker but coming from what part of the pitch? Wing? And you see here (in Manchester United) they have put him in the centre. And you should

remember in the Emirates Cup who scored us (Arsenal)? Is it not Martial that scored us? Where did he emerge from to score that goal? From the wing.

...

And this Leicester City, they have a defender, Morgan. The dark one. Because even last season he is the one that denied Arsenal the three points. That Morgan, that Morgan. Morgan plays like he is the whole club.

This is comparable to the epic narrative technique. He is like an epic singer that vividly recalls the details of the past matches, down to which player scored a goal and how he did it. He also includes the poetic aspects of epic in praising players, such as, in the second extract above, using repetition to create a musical effect and a repertoire of images used in reference to Leicester player (Wes) Morgan such, *they have a defender, the dark one, the one that denied us three points, and plays like he is the whole club*. It has been observed by Stephen Belcher, the improvisational use of images and phrases that is an important linguistic technique of the epic singer.²⁸

Metaphors and inter-texts

This article argues that the narrativization of television mediated soccer is also a medium through which the performers are able to engage with their sociocultural world view through metaphoric extension and allusion. This perspective is informed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen's concept of metaphor and/as cultural coherence. They have argued, that the most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphoric structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture.²⁹ In this context, we can also integrate allusion within the wider concept of metaphoric coherence and in that sense read engage with a relatively new metaphor in Kenya known as *Sonko*. In contemporary Kenya, one of the popular ways of conceptualizing material wealth has been the concept of *Sonko*, which is a colloquial term that is a recent replacement of the earlier terms *Tajiri*, a wealthy man and *Mdosi*, also a colloquial term for a wealthy man. Significantly, the three terms could also be used in reference to a boss or anyone in a position of power. Notably though, *Sonko* also captures the aspects of arrogance, unpredictability and narcissism that are sometimes associated with the wealthy. In the Kenyan set-up, it is believed that *Sonko's* word, right or wrong, is final; because, in this part of the world, material wealth tends to be considered as the ultimate source of power.

I noted that these narrators described situations of helplessness before a stronger force using the *Sonko metaphor*. For instance, when Joshua and Geoffrey, separately, describe the state of affairs at Chelsea, they used the *Sonko* metaphor to underline the apparent helplessness of the situation.

- Joshua: You know at Chelsea it is like this. We are a bit different from you ... we are private ... Now if *Sonko* decides that Mourinho has to go, there is nobody he will consult before the decision is made.
- Geoffrey: Because Hazard was signed by *the boss*, and to get him out of the club has become an impossible task ... If it was me in Mourinho's shoes, I just go direct to the boss ...

This perhaps comes out clearly again in an exchange between Geoffrey and Sammy on the transfer of goalkeeper Peter Cech from Chelsea to Arsenal:

Sammy: And why did he (Mourinho) let Peter Cech move to Arsenal?
 Geoffrey: It is not him (Mourinho) that sold him. He was just shocked to learn that the boss had sold him! ... And you should know that Peter Cech was a personal friend of the boss.

This metaphor not only helps us to understand and experience one set of circumstances in terms of another, as Lakoff and Johnson have defined Metaphor, but also becomes a medium through which we can understand a social condition in the Kenyan contemporary context and how ordinary people interpret and live with it.³⁰

Metaphoric *seeing* is also predominantly used by the narrators and it is mostly done in the sense of the rhetoric question *unaona?* Whose direct translation would be ‘do you see?’ Nonetheless, this question is a wide metaphoric expression that has got nothing to do with the actual visual perception (using eyes) and its actual function could be understood in what Lakoff and Johnson have described as the container metaphors, and in particular, synecdoche³¹ and also plays the phatic function³² of communication. As a synecdoche, it is used in the sense that only one part, seeing, is used to stand for the wider processes of comprehension and understanding. As a phatic marker, it is used to keep the channel of communication open and, in the context of the narrative performance, reassure the narrator that he is still connected to the audience. Consider the part of narrative below by Geoffrey.

Let me explain. You know, something about football, it is a strange game. Do not consider the fatness of a player. *You see?* You could be fat, so when the ball comes at you, you chest it down and have the strength to ward off everyone. True? But then after getting the ball in your feet you will not manage to guard it. *You see?* So Aguero is versatile at guarding the ball. *You see?* ... And then there is the game pattern. *You see* even when Diego Costa is not in the Chelsea line-up there will be no pattern. *You see?* ...

This extract is taken from a debate on who is the better player between two Manchester City strikers then; Kun Aguero and Wilfred Bony. It may not sound any phenomenal to a Kiswahili speaker. It is just how we express ourselves. But embedded within this apparent ordinary mode of expression in Kiswahili is both conceptual framing and dramatic technique tied around *seeing* as a metaphor. The narrator is in the process of making what he believes to be a delicate distinction between two players, their body types and functional value of these body types in their game. He thus wants to ensure that this explanation is clearly understood, but instead of asking them if they have understood him he asks if they can see. But this metaphor is also used to connect the narrator and his audience, and its repeated use is to ensure that the connection is still intact.

This performer–audience harmony is however not always the case, especially in those performances that happen in what we referred to as ‘the natural setting’ and an allusion to this can be read in Geoffrey’s comment that ‘if someone talks about his team’s chances in terms of next season, do not prod him too much because he could even slap you’. This is a comment made in relation to the fans of Manchester United, whose performance at that point in the season was rather poor. However, this is not just an allusion to the occasional violence that characterized these performance sessions but also the wider carnival-like teasing and verbal dueling, in this case captured in the term ‘prodding’, between fans of perceived traditional rival teams. In the Kenyan context, this has tended to be the Arsenal–Manchester United rivalry.³³ One could thus argue that the narrative performance itself, in its various patterns and formations, is also a metaphoric extension of the performance of

identities in an enabling context; the flexible and accommodating storyworld that produces these audience communities in the first place.

Conclusion

This article has investigated soccer-talk as an aspect of popular culture in contemporary Kenyan society. These are conversations are based on, but not limited to, the theme of English Premier League soccer. The conversations are blended within the daily rhythms of life of the participants. The participants get to know about this soccer mainly as audiences of satellite sport television, although there are other media such as local electronic and print media, rumour and hearsay. The main objective of the article was to investigate the status of these audiences against the argument that as an audience community, they are a uniformly reconfigured in ways that do not give them any agency; that they are television-mediated audiences. However, a counter argument was made that in the process of engaging in soccer-talk, this audience community is represented as consisting of individuals with varied performance capacities. This was evident in the tendency of some of the participants to attract others before whom they perform in what were termed as the *natural settings*, away from the television screen, thereby engaging in a practice referred to here as oral narrative extension of media.

It could be argued that one of the important findings that inform this article is that the oral narrative extension of the English Premier League soccer is a moment of cultural production in the context of media reception. We could argue that whatever is produced here is a storyworld that accommodates both some factual details about soccer and also creative narratives by members of the audience. This performance demonstrated a distinct structure and also varied narrative capacities and techniques. It was noted that some of the performers were clearly dominant in the performance. However, it was established that the whole process is dynamic and highly adaptable to the changing conditions of performance. Overall, it is hoped that findings of this study provoke a rethinking of perceptions on the status of sport television-mediated communities and also the related concepts of television sport mediation and viewing.

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Notes

1. Akindes, 'Transnational Television and Football', 4; Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale, 'Sports and European Soccer Fan'.
2. Akindes, 'Transnational Television and Football', 4.
3. Omobowale, 'Sports and European Soccer', 628.
4. Waliaula, 'Envisioning and Visualizing English football', 240.
5. Siundu, 'European Football Worlds', 339.

6. Vokes, 'Arsenal in Bugamba'.
7. Olaoluwa and Adejayan, 'Thierry Henry as Igwe'.
8. Vokes, 'Arsenal in Bugamba', 10–11.
9. Olaoluwa and Adejayan, 'Thierry Henry as Igwe', 79–94.
10. Bird, 'From Fan Practices', 85–104.
11. Rowe, 'Sport and its Audience', 509–25.
12. Bateson, 'Media is the Difference', 33.
13. Shimpach, 'Viewing', 62–85.
14. Abercrombie and Longhurst, *A Sociological Theory*, 226.
15. Spitulnik, 'Thick Context', 105–26.
16. Mpesa is a typically Kenyan but nowadays East African mobile money transfer service. The actual service points are mini kiosks run by agents.
17. This is a popular Barber-Shop at West Indies Centre, also serves as a European Soccer viewing parlour.
18. At the time of research for this article, Gerald had served as a butcher at West Indies Shopping Centre for over 14 years.
19. Matatu is the name of a mini van that provides public transport. It is significant though that Matatu crew, the driver and his assistant, have tended to belong to a subculture of sorts, characterized by deliberate performance of machismo, mostly loud and combative and generally a streetwise community that is also closely knit. They frequently engage in what Larkin (2008, 147) has referred to as verbal jousting. One could argue that this verbal artistry is developed in their line of duty and then applied in other contexts, such as audiencing.
20. The matatu driver assistant.
21. This is a rider of public service moto-cycles, popularly known in Kenya as boda boda because they were first used at the border crossing points between Kenya and Uganda, in the Busia and Malaba border towns.
22. Formalist theorists of narrative analysis, such as Vladimir Propp, have argued that all oral narratives are similar in terms of their structure, and that the initial situation is the equivalent of the exposition in drama, setting the state for the narrative flow.
23. Collin Harvey, 'A Taxonomy of Transmedia', 278–94.
24. Bruner, 'Self Making', 28.
25. Heron, *The Poetry*, 13–14.
26. Finnegan, *Limba Stories*, 62–8.
27. Okpewho, *African Oral Literature*, 51–2.
28. Belcher, *Epic Traditions*, 17–18.
29. Lakoff and Johnsen, *Metaphors*, 23–5.
30. *Ibid.*, 35–40.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Waugh, 'Jacobson: Language and Poetics', 57–82.
33. Perhaps the strong rivalry between the Kenyan fans of Arsenal and Manchester United may be explained by the fact that cable sport television only became widespread in Kenya from the late 1990s onwards. It happens that this coincided with the dominance of Manchester United and Arsenal in the English Premier League.

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