

THE NICKNAMES OF AFRICAN NATIONAL TEAMS: AN INSTRUMENT FOR BOTH SOCIAL COHESION AND HOOLIGANISM.

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Abstract: This article is a pragmatic study of the hypocoristic values of the nicknames African national soccer teams. The theory used is the Elinor Och's 1980 indexicality theory. It analyses the nicknames of the fifty-four African nations and focuses on how those hypocoristic names function as an instrument for the expression of identity, pride, will of power and national social cohesion, as emphasized by J. Simpson (2008: 1). It also shows how when crystalized and out of control, the awareness of the national pride can cause social uprising and hooliganism. This study employs a qualitative research approach which allows for a more comprehensive and holistic understanding.

Key words: Cohesion, identity, pride, nation, nicknames, hooliganism

Résumé : Cet article est une étude pragmatique. L'étude épouse la forme d'une analyse des charges sémantiques hypocoristiques des surnoms des équipes nationales de football. La théorie de l'étude est celle de l'indexicalité d'Elinor Ochs. Il présente une analyse des surnoms des 54 nations Africaines et démontre comment ces hypocoristiques fonctionnent comme un instrument pour l'expression de l'identité, la fierté, la volonté de puissance et de cohésion nationale. Elle montre également que lorsqu'elle est cristallisée et non maîtrisée, la conscience de la fierté nationale peut causer des soulèvements et la violence de la part des supporters.

Mots clés: cohésion, fierté, identité, nation, surnom, violence.

Introduction

The passion that arises from national pride can sometimes bring all the nation around a common ideal. In such a framework, nations can be built around social cohesion and unity. In the field of football, each national team has its own pride, its glory but also its frustration, its disappointment. African nations have freely chosen some emblems meant to refer to their countries and represents its image. Most of the time, the nicknames vehicles an image that crystalize the identity, the image of the nation.

The relation between the nicknames of African national football teams and the question of social cohesion and peace is the matter of the present communication. Some subsidiary questions could arise from the historical or cultural event that influenced their adoption. How do the nicknames reflect the cultural, ethnic and national identity of the countries they represent? What roles have the colonial histories and post-colonial identities play in the formation of these nicknames? And specifically, do these nicknames play a role in social cohesion and hooliganism? To answer these questions, it is important to categorize the nicknames under question so as to uncover the ideal they portray.

Matters like the role of the representation of the country's image through the representation of its nickname and the way bad officiating, loss of national pride, allegations of magic charms use, lack of fair play, rivalry between nations and the report of fake news of violence function as triggers for football hooliganism, will be addressed. The objectives of the study are to explore the role of football in shaping national identity in African countries through the categorization of all the nicknames, examining the relationship between football and social cohesion and exploring the social cohesion and upheaval that these nicknames underscore.

This study analyses the data collected based on the indexicality theory developed by linguistic anthropologist Elinor Ochs in the 1980s. This allowed for an exploration of the complex relationship between football, nationhood, and identity in Africa in relation to social cohesion and upheaval. Ochs' indexicality theory posits that language is not just a neutral tool for communication, but rather is a system of signs and symbols that carries social meaning. This means that even simple linguistic choices, like the words we use or the way we pronounce them, including names and nicknames can index (or point to) broader social and cultural factors. For

example, the nickname of the South African national team, Bafana Bafana, (a Zulu term for “the boys”) indexes a particular kind of national identity, one that is uniquely South African.

1. Overview of the Study

According to the Oxford Languages Dictionary by Sir James Murray in collaboration with Oxford University Press, (1998), nicknames are familiar or oftentimes humorous names given to person/persons or thing(s) instead of the use of the person’s or group’s real names, it is usually descriptive or a representation of what the person or group depicts or stand for. Following the definition, the nickname of a national football team can be a source of pride and unity. It can also be a tool for social change, positive or negative. The nicknames of African national teams are particularly interesting in the sense that they not only reflect the history and culture of the country but also show the richness of the flora and fauna of the countries. It often shows the beauty of biodiversity. For example, the team from Ghana is nicknamed the Black Stars, which references the country's struggle for independence. “Super Eagles”, the nickname of the national team of Nigeria reflects the iconic eagle on the nation’s coat of arm. Having stated these, it is pertinent to conclude that Football is more than just a sport in; it has become a way of life of the people, a source of pride and beacon of identity, and a unifying force across countries and communities.

1.1. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach. This favors a more comprehensive and holistic understanding. It involves collecting and analyzing data in the form of textual sources got from online. This approach allows for a more in-depth understanding of the social and cultural aspects of African national football team nicknames. It also gives us insight into the nuances and complexities of the topic. The data which comprises fifty-four African football nicknames has been analysed using Elinor Ochs’ (1980) indexicality theory. These fifty-four nicknames are categorized on four colourings such as colours and cosmos, zoology, linguistics and historical heritage. This is done for clarity purposes and ease of understanding.

2. Overview of Football in Africa.

According to Peter Alegi (2010), soccer came to Africa by the British colonials in the mid-1800s. The first of the game ever recorded on paper was played in South Africa in 1862 a year before the rules of the game were formally codified. Alegi strongly opines that soccer has been

an important sport in Africa for as long as it was played in Europe. There is no doubt about the importance of soccer game in the African soil. According to anthropologist Simon Kuper (2004), football has become more of an Africa's secular religion which is in line with Richard Giulianotti (2001) who argued that football plays a vital role in shaping or molding the sense of nationhood in postcolonial Africa. To underscore these positions maintained by these scholars, Anthropologist Allen Guttmann (2002) has earlier buttressed that football is a reflection of a country's national identity; stating also that the national teams embody a nation's pride and prestige and this is equally reflected in their choice of nicknames. In addition, cultural critic John Nauright (2001) had written that African national football teams have become symbols of national culture and identity and this stance also underscores the fact that these African football teams and their chosen nicknames are also instruments for social cohesion and upheaval.

2.1. Fifty-four African National Football Teams' Nicknames

The nicknames of African national football teams are listed in the table to clearly show these nicknames at a go.

	COUNTRY	NICKNAME		COUNTRY	NICKNAME
1	Nigeria	Super Eagles	28	Ethiopia	Walyas
2	South Africa	Bafana Bafana	29	Eswatini	King's Shield
3	Morocco	Atlas Lions	30	Gabon	Panthers
4	Ghana	Black Stars	31	The Gambia	Scorpions
5	Cameroon	Indominable Lions	32	Guinea	National Elephants
6	Côte d'ivoire	Elephants	33	Guinea-Bissau	African wild Dogs
7	Senegal	Lions of Teranga	34	Kenya	Harambee Stars
8	Egypt	Pharaohs	35	Lesotho	Crocodiles
9	Algeria	The Desert Warriors	36	Liberia	Lone Stars
10	Zambia	Chipolopolo(Copper Bullets)	37	Libya	Mediterranean Knights
11	Burkina Faso	Stallions	38	Madagascar	The Barea
12	Mali	Eagles	39	Malawi	Flames
13	Tunisia	Eagles of Carthage	40	Mauritania	Almoravids
14	Benin	Squirrels	41	Mauritius	Dodos or Club M
15	Sierra Leone	Leone Stars	42	Mozambique	Mambas
16	Angola	Palancas Nebraska(Black Sable Antelopes)	43	Niger	The Mena
17	Botswana	Dipitse (Zebras)	44	Namibia	Brave Warriors
18	Burundi	Burundi Swallows	45	Rwanda	Wasps
19	Cape Verde	Blue Sharks	46	Sao Tome and Principe	Green Yellows

20	Central African Republic	Big Cats or Wild Beasts	47	Seychelles	Seychelles Pirates
21	Chad	The Sao	48	Somalia	Ocean Stars
22	Comoros	Coelacanth	49	South Sudan	Bright Stars
23	Congo	Red Devils	50	Sudan	Nile Crocodiles
24	Djibouti	Shoremen of the Red	51	Tanzania	Taifa Stars
25	DR Congo	Leopards	52	Togo	Sparrow Hawks
26	Equatorial Guinea	Nzalang Nation (The National Thunder)	53	Zimbabwe	Warriors
27	Eritrea	Red Sea Camels	54	Uganda	Cranes

2.2. Categorisation of Football Nicknames

The African national football nicknames have some hypocoristic values that can be classified according to their semantics.

2.2. 1. Zoological Colouring

Nigeria – Super Eagles

Morocco – Atlas Lions

Cameroon – Indomitable Lions

Côte d’Ivoire –Elephants.

Senegal – Lions of Teranga

Burkina Faso – Stallions

Mali – Eagles

Tunisia-Eagles of Carthage

Benin – Squirrels

Angola – Palancas Nebraska (Black Sable Antelopes)

.Botswana – Dipitse (Zebras)

Cape Verde – Blue Sharks

Central African Republic – Big Cats or Wild Beasts

Gabon – Panthers.

The Gambia-Scorpions

Guinea – National Elephants

Guinea-Bissau – African Wild Dogs

Lesotho – Crocodiles

Togo – Sparrow Hawks

Rwanda – Wasps

Sudan – Nile Crocodiles

DR Congo – Leopards2

Mozambique – Mambas

2.2.2. Colours and Cosmic Colouring

Ghana – Black Stars

8. Djibouti – Shoremen of the Red Sea

Equatorial Guinea – Nzalang Nacional (The National Thunder)

Eritrea – Red Sea Camels

Congo – Red Devils 24

Malawi – Flames 40

Sao Tome and Principe – Green Yellows

Sierra Leone-Leone Stars

Somalia – Ocean Stars

.South Sudan – Bright Stars

Tanzania – Taifa Stars

2.2.3. Linguistic Colouring

Zimbabwe – Warriors

Namibia – Brave Warriors

Burundi – Burundi Swallows

2.2.4. Historical heritage colouring

Algeria – The Desert Warriors

Zambia – Chipolopolo (Copper Bullets)

Comoros – Coelacanth

23. Sea

Ethiopia – Walyas

Eswatini – King’s Shield

Kenya – Harambee Stars

Libya – Mediterranean Knights

Madagascar – The Barea

Mauritania – Almoravids

Mauritius – Dodos or Club

Niger – The Mena

Seychelles – Seychelles Pirates

54. Uganda – Cranes

Chad – The Sao

Egypt- Pharaohs

3. Nicknames as an Instrument of Social Cohesion

The nicknames of the African national football teams can contribute to national pride and unity on the one hand and to national identity and cohesion on the other hand.

3.1. Nicknames as Factors for National Pride and Unity

Many African national teams have chosen animal-related nicknames, such as the Lions, Crocodiles, Sparrows, Elephants, Eagles, and Cheetahs. These nicknames can be seen as a way to project strength, speed, and agility. Additionally, some national teams have chosen nicknames that reference their country's history or culture, such as the Algerian national team's nickname, the Desert Warriors, which is a reference to the country's history of struggle and resilience and it has been a source of pride for the country since the team was established in the 1950s. Another interesting team is Bafana Bafana, the nickname of the South African national team. Bafana Bafana means "the boys" in Zulu, and it reflects the importance of football in South African culture. The Angolan team, nicknamed the Palancas Negras, or the Black Antelopes was chosen to reflect the country's national animal, the giant sable antelope, and it's been used since the 1970s. Tunisia, Carthage Eagles or Eagles of Carthage nickname references the ancient city of Carthage, which was once located in what is now modern-day Tunisia.

The Egyptian team, nicknamed the Pharaohs references Egypt's ancient history, and it also reflects the team's status as one of the most successful in Africa. The Moroccan team is called the Atlas Lions, which references the Atlas Mountains that run through the country. The Gambian team, the Scorpions, which reflects the presence of scorpions in the country's savanna and desert regions a show of the beauty of social cohesion and biodiversity.

Ivory Coast team, known as the Elephants references the country's national animal, and it also reflects the team's strength and power. The Kenyan team is nicknamed the Harambee Stars, which means "all pull together" in Swahili reflects the team's role as a symbol of national unity.

Nigeria, whose national team, the Super Eagles was inspired by the country's national bird, the eagle, which is a symbol of strength and power. The Super Eagles are one of Africa's most successful teams, having won the Africa Cup of Nations three times. It has been a symbol of pride and social unity in the country.

Libya's national team, nicknamed the Mediterranean Knights is a nod to Libya's location on the Mediterranean Sea, and it also represents the team's strength and power. There is the Madagascar's team, nicknamed the Barea. This nickname is derived from the Malagasy language, which is the national language of Madagascar. Barea means "the land of the brave", and it is a fitting nickname for the national team and indexes national pride and social unity.

3.2. Nicknames as Factors of National Identity and Cohesion

Kenya's team, the Harambee Stars is derived from the Swahili phrase "Harambee", which means "to work together for a common goal". This reflects the team's commitment to teamwork and cooperation, which is an important part of the Kenyan culture. In addition, the word "harambee" is also used as a national motto and is part of the country's motto. Furthermore, the Ethiopia's team, nicknamed the Walyas is derived from the Walia ibex, a rare type of mountain goat that is native to them. It is a symbol of national identity and cohesion.

Comoros' national team, known as the Coelacanths is derived from the coelacanth fish, which is native to Comoros and is considered a living fossil. The coelacanth fish is known for its resilience and adaptability, which reflects the team's fighting spirit. Seychelles' team, nicknamed the Pirate is a reference to the country's history as a hub for pirates and privateers in the 18th century. The nickname also reflects the team's tenacity and resilience, as well as their desire to succeed despite the odds. Mauritius, called Club M. is a reference to the island's iconic dodo bird, which is extinct but was a symbol of national identity, pride and strength. The team's nickname reflects the spirit of the dodo bird, which never backs down in the face of adversity or strife.

As for the national team of Togo, nicknamed Les Eperviers, which means "The Sparrow hawks" in French is derived from the sparrow hawk bird, which is known for its hunting prowess

and sharp vision. The nickname also represents the team's determination and focus on victory. The national team of Uganda, nicknamed the Cranes is derived from the grey crowned crane, which is the country's national bird. The grey crowned crane is known for its grace, beauty, and elegance.

The national team of Sudan, the Falcons is a reference to the peregrine falcon, which is known for its speed and grace. The nickname also represents the team's strength and determination. The nickname for Mauritania's national team is the Almoravids, which refers to the Almoravid dynasty that ruled in Mauritania and other parts of Africa in the 11th and 12th centuries, It is a historical heritage. Tanzania's team nickname is the Taifa Stars, which means "National Stars" in Swahili. This nickname reflects the team's pride and national spirit, as well as the beauty of the night sky over Tanzania. For Zimbabwe's team, the nickname is the Warriors, which reflects the team's strength and determination.

When a country's national team has a nickname that reflects the country's culture or history, it helps to build a sense of national pride and unity. For example, when the people of Mauritania see their team called the Almoravids, it connects them to a part of their history and creates a sense of common identity. This is true for other national teams and their nicknames. In general, these nicknames are a way to celebrate and recognize the unique culture and history of each country.

4. Nicknames as Instrument of Hooliganism

Instead of national identity and cohesion, when national pride is exacerbated, it can lead to social unrests.

4.1. Nicknames and Social Upheaval

There are a few ways that a national team's nickname can bring about upheaval, either positive or negative. First, a national team's nickname can bring about upheaval by giving a voice to marginalized groups within a country. For example, the nickname for the Cameroonian national team, the Indomitable Lions, is a symbol of strength and resilience, especially for the Anglophone minority in the country. The nickname recognizes and celebrates this group, and it gives them a sense of pride and belonging.

Another way is that it can help to challenge the status quo or dominant culture in a country. For example, the nickname for the Moroccan national team, the Atlas Lions, is a nod to

the Atlas Mountains, which were a center of resistance against European colonial rule. This nickname celebrates the country's history of resistance and defiance, and it can inspire current generations to challenge injustice and inequality. In the same vein, the nickname of the Kenyan national team, the Harambee Stars, celebrates the national motto of Kenya, Harambee, which means "Let's all pull together." This motto is especially meaningful for marginalized groups in Kenya. Some form of social upheaval can erupt through a chosen nickname by fostering a sense of national pride and unity in times of crisis. During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, for example, the nickname of the Sierra Leone national team, the Leone Stars, took on new meaning. The team's nickname, which refers to the country's national currency, the leone, became a symbol of hope and strength during that difficult time. The team's success on the field also brought a much-needed sense of joy and pride to the people of Sierra Leone.

Another example is, the nickname of the Moroccan national team, the Atlas Lions, is not only a source of pride for the country, but it has also been used as a symbol of strength and resilience in the face of adversity. In recent years, the team's success has helped to unify the country and foster a sense of national pride. Similarly, the nickname of the Namibian national team, the Brave Warriors, has been a source of unity and pride for the country. Even though Namibia is a relatively young country

5. Triggers of Football Violence

Violence in football is caused by various factors that stir up the flames of violence and sets beams of fire. The most common are: bad officiating, loss of national pride, allegations of magic charms use, lack of fair play, rivalry between nations and the report of fake news of violence.

5.1. Bad Officiating

Some football actions are diversely appreciated by football fans. They create some controversies between fans of different nations. One the recent ones is the yellow card received by Sadio Mane, the penalty given to Nicholas Pépé during the latest African Nation Cup are some the alleged controversial about refereeing acts. These actions are still discussed among fans in social networks and have given rise to a spirit of suspicion, mistrust and resentment, especially among young people.

5.2. Loss of National Pride

Football is the “king” sport in most of the African countries. So, when there is a football match, all the streets are empty and the bars are full of people. That crowd of fans, particularly those who are drunk or under the influence fanaticism, is difficult to get under control. The frustration of losing an important match or the shame of a severe defeat sometimes causes football hooliganism.

The following working definition is suggested, adapted from the work of Rookwood (2009, 2014): A football hooligan is an individual who attends football matches with the intention of becoming involved in violence with rival supporters (whether or not they achieve that aim) or a fan who becomes involved in violence (but not other disorder or criminal activities) even if this was not their initial aim, within a football context. “Rival supporters” can include those who follow the same club or national team but would more commonly serve as a reference to fans of opposing teams (Rookwood 2014, p5).

Very recently the catastrophic defeat of The Elephants, the national team of Côte d’Ivoire against Equatorial Guinea, the 22nd of January 2024 caused an eruption a violence in Abidjan with a significant property loss in all the town.

5.3. Allegations of Magic Charms Use

Allegations of the use of supra human power in football have been reported in many area in Africa. Juju, voodoo, black magic and others names refer to the use of superpowers by fans, players, coaches to affect football games. Some cases reported in newspapers (The Athletic.com):

- A Nigerian FA official running onto the pitch mid-game to remove a charm from the back of Senegal’s goal during a quarter-final in 2000.
- Members of the Cameroonian coaching staff being caught placing a charm on the pitch before the semi-final against Mali in 2002.
- Ghana fans carrying pots containing leaves and liquid to scare away devils before their opening game against Guinea in 2008.

- Ghana's Andre Ayew sprinkling a white powder onto the pitch before the 2015 AFCON final against Ivory Coast. (The Athletic.com)

These kinds of allegations are difficult to verify and often lead to feelings of revenge in the part of teams which claim to be victims of these practices.

5.4. Use of Profanity

To profane the national symbols of a country is very reprehensible act of irreverence. This kind of deeds caused some troubles between Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire during the 2022 Cameroonian AFCON. The Ivorian flag was reported to have been desecrated by some influential people of social networks. Some Ivorian responded by burning the Cameroonian flag. Fortunately, the authorities in each of the two countries took some measures and got the situation under control.

5.5. Lack of Fair Play and Political Tensions

The unity around national identities and the pride that derives from the power of the names of national teams create a psychological environment that favors social negative upheaval instead of fair play reactions. Most hooligans are intolerant in the name of the pride of their nations and are ready to attack rival fans to defend the glory of their nations. These political tensions can have two forms: internal and external, between different countries.

It's true that national team nicknames can also be a source of conflict and upheaval within a country. For example, in some cases, a national team's nickname can reflect or exacerbate tensions between different regions or ethnic groups within a country. For example, in Cameroon, there have been tensions between the Anglophone and Francophone regions of the country. The nickname of the Cameroonian national team, the Indomitable Lions, is regarded as a symbol of Francophone dominance over the Anglophone minority. This has led to some unrest and violence, both on and off the football pitch. The nickname of the Nigerian national team, the

Super Eagles, has been a source of pride for the country. However, there have been instances of the nickname being used as a rallying cry for unrest, particularly during times of political tension. Another example is that of Nigeria, in 1993. The Super Eagles' loss in the African Cup of Nations was blamed for triggering a coup attempt in the country.

5.6. Rivalry between Nations

Football derbies can cause rivalry between national teams. For example, Senegal versus Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire versus Cameroon; Mali versus Côte d'Ivoire are derbies with high risks of violence or football hooliganism. . And a fundamental upheaval arises, though remote, when the Nigerian team sees itself as a “Super Eagle” as different from the Malian “Eagle” and also the Cote d'Ivoire “Elephants” and opposed to the Guinean “National Elephants”. There are definitely some similarities between the nicknames of different national teams, and these similarities can be seen as a way to assert power and dominance. For example Nigerian Super Eagles over Mali's Eagles or Tunisia Eagle of Carthage have a common animal which is symbolic of their strength but the strength comes with its distinctive qualities where the former is said to be “super” that is superior to the rest.

5.7. Fake News and Negative Connotations

Some fake news of football violence against some national fans in another country can create an eruption of revenge acts that can be particularly violent. The connotations of the nicknames can be associated to negative events or defaults. Sometimes, the Ivorians players are said to be as heavy as elephants as the symbol of the team is the elephant. Similarly, the nickname of the Malian national team, the Eagles, has also been associated with political unrest

Conclusion

The analysis of the nicknames of the African national football team in the framework of the theory of indexicality developed by Elinor Ochs has provided many results. African national football teams, as all the other nations, have their own symbols such as the flag, the anthem and the emblems. Nicknames in this circumstance, are self-chosen with great care and are supposed to polarize all the national identity and pride. Nicknames such as Super Eagles or Indomitable Lions are hypocoristic names designed to boost national pride. The nicknames can be

categorized into four groups according to the zoological colouring, historical heritage colouring, colours and cosmic colouring linguistic colouring. There is a relation between football and social cohesion given that the passion it creates around national pride can bring the inhabitants of the nation together around a common cause, the glory and pride of the nation. The image of the country must be kept high in honor and glory.

The image or glory of the country through the representation that emerges from the country's nickname can be belittled due to a poor performance. In this case, frustrations can be difficult to get under control. Moreover, situations such as bad officiating, loss of national pride, allegations of magic charms use, lack of fair play, rivalry between nations and the report of fake news of violence can cause troubles or result in hooliganism or other social violence from frustrated fans.

The pride that derives from the power of the names of national teams is a double-edged knife. The hypocoristic names of African nations function as instruments for the expression of identity, pride, will of power and national social cohesion. However, when crystallized and out of control, the awareness of the national pride can cause football hooliganism and social uprising. Nations should be very careful in managing national pride in relation with football.

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