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**FOOTBALL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE EXAMPLE OF SUPER EAGLES OF NIGERIA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE 2018 FIFA WORLD**

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**ABSTRACT**

On June 14, 2018, FIFA World Cup kicked-off in Russia. Fortunately, Nigeria qualified for the competition and had players of different ethnic nationalities to play under the national team, Super Eagles. The tournament was at a period of heightened tension caused by the secessionist agitations, under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu, of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The agitation was such that many Igbo people living in the Northern part of the country (dominated by the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group) were asked to return to Igboland. In the same manner, Northerners in Igboland faced several threats. But once the World Cup started, there was a shift from the status-quo-ante, as ethnic appendages were deemphasized. This paper relied on oral history method, social media posts and ethnographic survey to argue that the application of football is a potent tool for national cohesion. The study did not deny that the aforementioned national spirit was short-lived; instead, it maintained that same could be exploited in nation building attempts. The study therefore recommended a well planned application of football in national questions.

**Key words:** Football. Super Eagles of Nigeria. Secessionist Agitations. National Identity and 2018 FIFA World Cup.

**RESUMO**

Futebol e identidade nacional: o exemplo da participação das Super Águias da Nigéria no Mundial FIFA 2018

Em 14 de junho de 2018, a Copa do Mundo FIFA começou na Rússia. Felizmente, a Nigéria se classificou para a competição e contou com jogadores de diferentes nacionalidades étnicas para jogar pela seleção nacional, as Super Águias. O torneio viveu um período de grande tensão causado pelas agitações separatistas, sob a liderança de Nnamdi Kanu, do Povo Indígena de Biafra (IPOB). A agitação foi tal que muitos Igbo que viviam na parte norte do país (dominado pelo grupo étnico Hausa-Fulani) foram convidados a regressar à Igbolândia. Da mesma forma, os nortistas da Igbolândia enfrentaram várias ameaças. Mas assim que o Campeonato do Mundo começou, houve uma mudança em relação ao status quo-ante, à medida que os apêndices étnicos foram menosprezados. Este artigo baseou-se no método da história oral, nas publicações nas redes sociais e na pesquisa etnográfica para argumentar que a aplicação do futebol é uma ferramenta potente para a coesão nacional. O estudo não negou que o referido espírito nacional tenha durado pouco; em vez disso, sustentou que o mesmo poderia ser explorado em tentativas de construção nacional. O estudo recomendou, portanto, uma aplicação bem planeada do futebol nas questões nacionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Futebol. Super águias da Nigéria. Agitações secessionistas. Identidade Nacional e Copa do Mundo FIFA 2018.

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The international football governing body, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) or International Federation of Association Football was founded in Paris, France, on May 21, 1904, when representatives from France, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Netherlands, Denmark and Belgium signed the foundation act, (FIFA, 2023).

With time, other countries of the world became member states. In Nigeria, there was no national football team at this time, what was obtainable were colonial Nigerian teams such as the Railway African Amateur Club, Locomotive Apprentice Football Club, Nigeria Marine African Staff Recreation Club, Lagos United Football Club, Diamond Football Club, Calabar XI, French Football Club, Posts and Telegraphs Football Club, and Red Roof Football Club (West African Pilot, Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1953, and The Nigerian Pioneer, Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1933).

By 1933, there was a growing interest in football in different parts of Nigeria. Consequently, there was an attempt to create a national football governing body on August 21, 1933 when colonial Nigeria's provincial clubs were invited to Lagos for an inaugural meeting that birthed the Nigeria Football Association (NFA), (Nigerian Daily Times, Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1933, West African Pilot, Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1953, and The Nigerian Tribune (Online) Monday 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2021). Twelve years later, 1945, the NFA was formally launched as a football governing body in Nigeria, (Bimpe, 2020 and School Software Pro, 2022).

In 1949, there was an arrangement to take colonial Nigerian footballers to England for a tour. It was in preparation for this that players from different regions of the country were selected from local clubs to make a team called the UK Tourists.

The 18 men selected were not to play in local clubs, as they were seen as being on the national level to represent the country, and from then, were referred to as the National team (Boer, 2018, HistoryVille, 2022 and Nwanze, 2014).

The name, UK Tourist was changed to The Red Devils, on their way back to Nigeria. By 1960, Nigeria gained her independence from Britain.

This was followed by a lot of changes in all sectors of the country. The national football team was renamed The Green Eagles of Nigeria, and in the same year, the country got registered with FIFA. The name Green Eagles lasted through 1988, when it was again, changed to the Super Eagles (Historyville, 2022).

## LITERATURE REVIEW, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PURPOSE

The application of football as a tool for nation building, national cohesion, and solidification of regimes and identity, started gaining global attention in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

For example while scholars like Amadasun, (1994) have studied the origin and evolution of the game, others focused on its relations to cultural practice and leisure in such places as Brazil, Zanzibar, England and West Indies (Akyeampong and Ambler, 2002, Martin, 2002, Fair, 1997).

Works from McPherson and Brooke (2012), Mvutsebanka (2020), Aliguechi and Frimeche (2022) studied football applications to carry out nationalistic agitations, and legitimizing authorities in places like Algeria Italy, Iraq, Arabian Peninsula and Burundi. In Nigeria, scholars have covered some aspects of football history evolution and compositions of some football clubs in different parts of the country, Amadasun, (1994). There are also studies on the leisure aspects of the game, Akindutire, (1991).

Ani and Anyanwu (2023), Anyanwu (Under Review), covered the aspects of the game in peacebuilding and racism during colonial Nigeria.

Their works maintain that football has been applied over history to bridge the gaps of social prejudices. Furthermore, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) (2010), Hough, (2018) pointed that football has been a tool for national liberation and self determination.

It has further been employed by FIFA, United Nations and other nongovernmental organizations as a tool to bridge ethnic and socio-political differences.

This was corroborated by Sepp Blatter, a former FIFA president who maintained that one of the global roles of football is the creation

of peace and understanding. More so, the NFF and her activities have been studied by.

Interestingly, there are also works on the perceptions and reactions of football fans during matches, (Giulianotti, 2002, Klugman, 2009). One common feature observed among football fans is the ability to form an identity. Although most of these identities are temporary, as they exist only during the periods of football games. Richard Giulianotti observed that during football matches, fans' unity is tied to the football teams, and this unity can be because of their sense of obligation, participation, quest for success and entertainment.

Additionally, Loy et al., (1978) and Hobsbawm (1992) maintained that spectator sports create affiliations and some sense of nationalism among fans. To Dionisio et al., (2008), the oneness created among fans of football has a 'tribal' coloration that preaches 'we' against them.

This awareness is best described using the Social Identity Theory. By social identity, this research means 'the individual's knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him [or her] of this group membership', (Tajfel, 1972).

While social group in this context refers to a people who see themselves as members of a body with common emotions and agreement, and are different from the rest of others, (Tajfel and Turner 1979, and Sherif et'al (1961). Social Identity is not the same as personal identity which preaches individual self realization, awareness and knowledge of what individuals know about themselves through their personal characteristics, observed Turner, (1982).

According to Tajfel and Turner, (1979), Social Identity Theory explains that having classified themselves into a social group, members try to realize positive self esteems which would differentiate them from members of other groups. Football creates this identity among spectators during matches.

One obvious gap in the above literature is lack of documentation of Nigerians' behaviors in the crises ridden Nigeria during the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. This research asks: How did the participation of the Super Eagles

affect the secessionist agitation of the IPOB? I argue that the tournament doused the tension that bedeviled some sections of Nigeria during this period, as there was a sense of national oneness among Nigerians. For instance, prior to the kickoff of the FIFA World Cup in that year, youths from the Igbo Ethnic group believed it was condemnable to mingle with people from Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. This study showed that spectatorship of the three matches the Super Eagles played (especially their match with Strákarnir okkar of Iceland on June, 22<sup>nd</sup>) created a sense of unity, common identity and goal among Nigerians.

The work does not lose sight of the fact that the cohesion created during this period was short-lived; rather, it maintained that such period of stalemate could be exploited to establish a lasting national spirit.

## RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTIONS

This research interrogated the impacts of the Super Eagles involvement in the 2018 FIFA World Cup held in Russia.

It studied how the participation contributed in Nigeria's national cohesion during this time that was defined by series of agitation in the Eastern part of the country by a secessionist group called the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) under the leadership of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu.

Archival materials, online publications, twitter, whatsapp and facebook posts, Ethnographic and oral history methods were used during data collection. Through purposive sampling, the interviewees were selected.

**Ethnographic Method:** By ethnography, this research means a research approach where the social interactions and behaviors of the group is directly examined through the participation and observation of the researcher, who later interprets what he has observed.

In 2018, these researchers watched the different football matches of the Super Eagles at different commercial football viewing centers, shown on the Table 1 below.

**Table 1** - The table shows the different locations the researchers viewed the different matches played by the Super Eagles of Nigeria, during the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

S/n	Date	Match Time	Opposing Team	Super Eagles Goals	Scorers	Places where the matches were viewed
1	June 16, 2018	21:00	Vatren of Croatia	0	No Scorer	Aba, Abia State of Nigeria.
2	June, 22, 2018	18:00	Strákarnir okkar of Iceland	2	Ahmed MUSA 49 Ahmed MUSA 75	Ehime Mbano, Imo State, Nigeria
3	June, 26, 2018	21:00	La Albiceleste of Argentina	1	Victor MOSES 51	Hausa Quarters, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

These three locations where these matches were watched were in three different states in South Eastern Nigeria, which was agitating for independence from Nigeria.

The states were strategic to this study because while Imo was having one of the greatest levels of the agitation, because the governor of the state, Chief Anayo Rochas Okorochoa was a member of the party ruling at the national centre - All Progressive Congress (APC) - Abia and Ebonyi States were the homes of the two most powerful members of the IPOB, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and Mr. Simon Ekpa, respectively. Furthermore, we selected viewing centers and sports bars with either good mixture of people from different ethnic groups, such as at Hausa Quarters in Abakaliki, or places with high level of tension caused by the activities of the agitators, such as Aba. We further observed people's reactions as the match was going on, in order to take note of viewers' perceptions of players from different ethnic groups.

**Oral History Methods and Purposive Sampling Approach:** This simply means the adoption of interviews to obtain information from respondents. It is a research methodological approach that focuses on extracting knowledge from the account of people in real time. It uses interviewing techniques to record people talking.

Oral history method is the systematic way used by qualitative researchers to extract information from their interviewees, (Ani and Anyanwu, 2023). It involves the researcher

planning his questions in an orderly way, (Structured Interviews), or keeping it open-ended, and navigating based on the information given by the respondent (Unstructured Interviews).

Field, (2007) observed that oral history method became pronounced as a tool for reconstruction of history since 1960s, when the wave of independence was sweeping across the countries of Africa, Asia and South America. Furthermore, the availability of such technologies as tape recorders contributed to the wide use of this research approach, maintained Field.

These researchers adopted this fieldwork approach in gathering data for this work. During the 2018 FIFA World Cup, we embarked on massive interviews, especially among people and at public football viewing centers. We also visited some roadside newspaper and magazine hawking centers where football lovers and pundits gathered to discuss and analyze footballs. In places like Lagos, Abuja and Kano we used telephone calls to interview our respondents to extract information for this research.

In total, we interviewed ten people from Yoruba, thirteen from Hausa, twenty seven from Igbo and six from Ibibio ethnic groups. These interviewees were selected using purposive sample approach - which is a non-probability sampling method where a researcher focuses on studying a certain or pre-determined population. Before we embarked on the field for interview, we have already decided that our

focus would be on such people as agitators for dismemberment of Nigeria, football fans from defined ethnic groups as those mentioned earlier.

Apart from the forgoing, we also visited such research institutions as the archives and libraries. For example, we explored the National archives of Nigeria, Enugu and Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria. In these institutions, we accessed newspaper records on the history and evolution of the Super Eagles of Nigeria. The two institutions armed us with such newspapers as *The West African Pilot*, *The Nigerian Pioneer* and *Nigerian Daily Times*.

These were colonial Nigeria's newspapers that contain important pieces of information useful in reconstructing football histories of the era. The reliance on these newspapers was because history of football especially before the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has not received adequate scholarly attention. Consequently, there were relatively no published texts that could give insight in studying this period.

Bingham (2012) and Gooding (2016) backed up the use of newspapers as credible documents for reconstruction of history because among other reasons, they were documented in real time. Online newspapers, facebook posts and comments, tweets and whatsapp statuses serve as media sources employed in our data collection.

These media information were fetched in real time during the 2018 FIFA World Cup. we also extracted information from online repositories of FIFA, Confederation of African Football (CAF) and Nigerian Football Federation (NFF). These alongside those mentioned earlier served as primary sources of data used for this work. Secondary data were sourced through textbooks, journal articles and so on. Content and descriptive analytical approaches were used to study variables.

In presenting our findings, we used tables to show data collected, while the rest of the discussions were done under thematic headings.

<sup>1</sup>Biafra was the name used to describe a secessionist state in South Eastern Nigeria, between

## NIGERIA ON THE EVE OF THE 2018 FIFA WORLD CUP

Since her independence on October 1 1960, Nigeria has faced questions of identity, existentiality and other challenges of nationhood.

The question and challenges of Nigeria's existence as a one country has been blamed on the amalgamation of the north and southern parts of the country by the colonial government of Lord Lugard in 1914, religious differences and corruption (Anyanwu, 2019, Ojukwu, 1989, Jacob et al., (2020), Boer, 2003).

These and the unbelief of the leaders of the country in a united Nigeria lead to the civil war that was fought between 1967-1970. The end of the war and the manner the post war reconstruction was managed remained a challenge to the unity of the country. For instance, there was the formation of many militia groups such as the O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), (Anyanwu, 2019, Jacob et al., 2020).

All these groups were ethnic based, with the aim of using agitations, protests, and other civil actions to make their voices heard, (Anyanwu, 2019). For instance, the MASSOB was formed to continue the agitation for the state of Biafra.<sup>1</sup> Its leader, an Indian-trained lawyer, Ralph Uwazuruike maintained that the group was non-violent and peaceful. It started working for the independence of Biafra through series of protests, rallies, hoisting of flag at strategic locations, and introduced 'national' identity cards and currency. Even when it was outlawed in 2001, MASSOB continued her activities. By 2005, its leader was jailed on the charges of treason. When he was released in 2007, there was reduction in the activities of the group.

This led to the formation of a faction called the Biafran Zionist Movement by a United Kingdom-based lawyer (The Nation Newspaper, November 6, 2012). By this time, there was an increasing rate of the activities of

1967-1970. It was made up of the Igbo ethnic group of the present day Nigeria.

Radio Biafra - London-based online radio station established to make daily broadcast in English and Igbo languages on the activities of the Biafran agitators- led by Nnamdi Kanu, one of Uwazuruike's employees. Kanu's popularity started growing stronger through his activities with the Radio Biafra such that by 2012, he pulled out from MASSOB and formed his own group, IPOB, and was to be deputized by Mr. Uche Okafor-Mefor (Jacob et al., 2020).

The emergence of General Muhammad Buhari as the president of Nigeria in 2015, and the growing rate of corruption, unemployment, inflation, insecurity and so on created disaffection by Nigerians, especially the youths. Kanu indulged to seize the opportunity to spread his secessionist agitation. His broadcast through the Radio Biafra, combined with the dilapidated state of Nigeria endeared the masses (especially the youth of South Eastern Nigeria) to him and his message. On October 4, 2015 Kanu was arrested by the Nigerian government, when he returned from UK to Nigeria, but was released on bail on April 28, 2017 (Orjinmo 2021, Busari and Nimi, 2021, Are 2021 and Ameh, 2021). Five months later, he fled Nigeria, when it was reported that the Nigerian Army invaded his home in Abia State, Nigeria, (Orjinmo 2021).

In 2018, the group's agitation became stronger with massive support base greater than ever. According to the National Daily Newspaper of May 28, 2018, on May 30<sup>th</sup> 2018, the group marked the 51<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Republic of Biafra.

This was done in conjunction with other secessionist agitation groups such as MASSOB, Movement of Biafrans in Nigeria (MOBIN), Eastern People's Congress (EPC), Biafran National Liberation Council (BNLC), Igbo Youths Cultural and Restoration Initiative (IYCRI), Biafran Revolutionary Organization (BRO), Biafran Liberation Crusade (BLC), Joint Revolutionary Council of Biafra (JRCB), Biafran Central Council (BCC) and Biafran United Liberation Council (BULCO).

This renewed agitation and government approaches towards them resulted to series of crises and ethnic animosities. Orders were

given on daily basis through Radio Biafra, for people of Igbo Ethnic group living in other parts of Nigeria to return to Igboland, while those from other groups, especially Hausa-Fulani in Igboland should vacate the region.

### 2018 FIFA WORLD CUP: PRESENTATIONS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF DATA FINDINGS

At the 73<sup>rd</sup> minutes into a game between Nigeria and Zambia on Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2017, Alex Iwobi, a Super Eagles player scored a lone goal that qualified Nigeria into the 2018 FIFA World Cup, played in Russia. That made it the sixth time Nigeria secured a slot into the FIFA World Cup since her membership in 1960. Her other five appearances were in 1994, 1998, 2002, 2010 and 2014, (FIFA, 2018).

Of all the appearances, the country had never been polarized as it was in 2017 when it qualified, and in 2018 when the tournament was played. But notwithstanding the polarization, the news of the qualification in 2017 and the fact that the player that scored the goal was of Igbo extraction was interpreted in different ways. To fans from the Igbo ethnic group, Nigeria could not exist and achieve such feats without depending on the Igbo people; while to the Hausa ethnic groups, among other parts of Nigeria, the Igbo people were talented, as such, should be held into Nigeria's nationhood by all means.

There were also those who held that the best part of Nigeria could be harnessed, if the country remains undividedly one. These divergent views were also obvious on social media, press conferences and so on. For instance after the match, Channels Tv - One of the widely viewed television channels in Nigeria - on her Facebook page reported on October 7, 2017 under the heading 'Nigeria Beat Zambia to Qualify for 2018 FIFA World Cup.' Table 2 below shows examples of people's perceptions and reactions over the news. Because of the focus of this study, the views collected were those promoting the oneness of Nigeria and the roles football could play through the Super Eagles.

**RBFF**  
**Revista Brasileira de Futsal e Futebol**

**Table 2** - This table shows Nigerian's reactions on the Super Eagles' qualification to the 2018 FIFA World Cup, as captured on Channels Tv facebook page.

S/n	Facebook Names of the Commenters	Unabridged Comments	Remark
1.	Dominic Nduese	'Football brings us together No Hausa no Igbo no Yoruba football is a unifying factor let's remain One nation and God bless Nigeria'	Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. At this period, the raging agitation was by the Igbo ethnic group who were against the federal government under Muhammad Buhari who was from the Hausa ethnic group. This commenter believed that football creates a one Nigeria that is free from ethnic cleavages.
2	Kelly Yussuf	'Congrat 2 d only national event that hold the country united.... No ijaw, no Biafra ,no Hausa no Yoruba, and no kanuri.....Up naija...'	To this commenter, football was the only thing that could hold Nigerians together. He noted that in football, there is no ethnicity as Ijaw, Bifra-Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and Kanuri, which are all ethnic groups in Nigeria.
3	Onyedika Michael Njoku	'This is the only time people are united or are not talking bad about each other's tribe'	To this commenter, it is only during football matches that people forget their ethnic cleavages.
4	Felix Ikechi	'The way football unit Nigeria, I hope our politicians can unit Nigeria the same way'	By 'unit', this commented meant unite. He believed that football brings more unity to Nigeria than the activities of the political leaders.
5	Jude Destiny	'The only thing that unit us... God bless Super eagles! Congrats 9ja'	The commenter believed that the national football team, Super Eagles was the only thing that could unite Nigeria.
6	Charles Victor	'I thank God for football. Nigeria is one with love in only football'	To Charles, love that cuts across ethnic boundaries comes only through football.
7	Raji Abiodun	'Congratulations, kudos to the duo of Lyon Balogun and Alex Iwobi. Super Eagles, the only team that doesn't require federal character to succeed'	Lyon Balogun and Alex Iwobi were Super Eagles players, and from different ethnic groups in Nigeria. This commenter believed that in football, Nigerians focus on individuals' qualification, instead of quota system.
8	Sese Sera Zion	'Football unit a nation, but politics is a reproach to such nation'	Sese saw football in Nigeria from the biblical angle. In the Holy Bible, it was recorded in Proverbs 14:34 that righteousness exalts a nation, but sin brings downfall. This commenter believed that football is the right tool needed to unite Nigeria, not politics.
9	Ndubest Emmanuel	'Wish the politicians will make Nigerians proud too'	Ndubest believed that the Super Eagles had contributed her quota to bring

			Nigerians together; it was left for the political leaders to consolidate same.
10	Doris S Rodriguez	Congratulations. 9ja this match shows that there is strength & progress in UNITY!! Up 9ja once again'	The word, '9ja' was used to refer to Nigeria. This commenter believed that the Super Eagles have shown that unity was essential to Nigeria's progress.
11	Akinyemi Abimbola Akinade	Great Nigeria united we stand...	To him, Nigeria can stand, if the citizens could unite as did the Super Eagles.
12	Olufemi Henry Ikudaisi	'As we are trying to make this country great individually I hope our politicians will also do the same thing. Thanks #lwobi Thanks #Super_Eagles #God_bless_Nigeria'	This commenter summed that the youths, through football have started the unification of Nigeria, he hoped the political leaders could follow it up. Alex lwobi was a Super Eagles player, from the Igbo Ethnic group, and was the one that scored the only goal in the match.
13	Idowu Olatunbosun Patrick	'Even Shekau will be happy with this victory I'm also sure Mazi Nnamdi KANU Will be happy too. We are stronger together as a Nation'	Shekau was the leader of a terrorist group in Northern Nigeria called Boko Haram, while Namdi Kanu was the leader of IPOB. Both of them were from different ethnic groups, and had deep hatred for each other. But this commenter held that notwithstanding their differences, football was the only thing that could satisfy and pacify them at the same time.
14	Don Paddy	'The truth of the matter is that countries these days are seeking expansion, cession or perhaps annexation which explains albeit in a subtle terms concepts like 'allies , Colonies, etc. Great countries are measured by among other things strength of military, which is why China is feared because she can comfortable boast of military strength of almost half a billion. Our case shouldn't be different otherwise mushroom countries like Togo, Cameroon the likes will start bullying us. Congrats one indivisible Nigerian Super Eagles. A one united Nigeria devoid of discrimination, marginalization, injustice, tribal cum religious sentiment could defeat any trojan force! Up super eagles'	Don Paddy gave reasons Nigeria should be united as one indivisible country. He cited examples of countries like China. He concluded by congratulating the Super Eagles, and prayed for a better nation in Nigeria.

One important thing to note at this point is that sports spectators mostly share in victories than losses. For instance, celebration, belief and identifying with a team are witnessed when the said team is getting positive results.

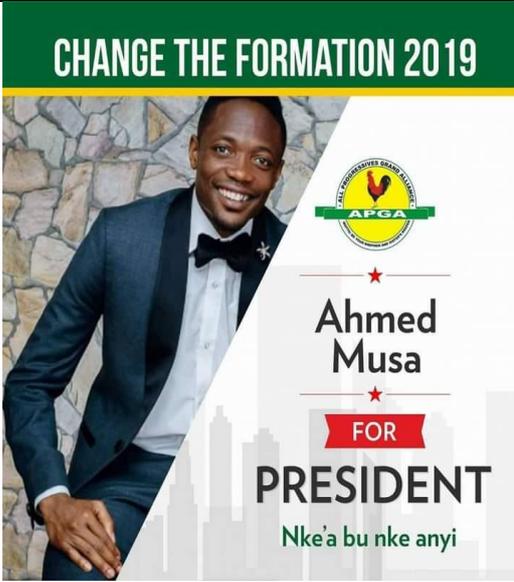
The foregoing played out during Nigeria's participation in the 2018 FIFA World Cup. As shown in the above table, Nigerians freely associated with the Super Eagles and further preached oneness of the country. But this did not last long, as agitators resorted to their agitations few days after the match. Then in 2018 when the tournament started, Croatia won in the first match the Super Eagles played.

Consequently, fans were polarized with varying opinions and disassociation with a 'one Nigeria represented by one football team. But the victorious clash against the Strákarnir okkar of Iceland was welcomed by all, as people were again, calling for a unified Nigeria.

In Table 3 below, people's reactions to the match against Iceland was captured. For example, when Channels Tv, on June 22, 2018 posted on her facebook page: 'GOAAAAAL: Brilliant effort from Ahmed Musa to double Nigeria's lead ..... It's 2-0', Nigerians rallied around the post to reacts as shown on Table 3.

**Table 3** - This table shows a selection of Nigerians reactions when Ahmed Musa- a Super Eagles' player from the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group - scored twice to hand Nigeria victory Over Iceland.

S/n	Facebook Names of Commenters	Unabridged Comments	Remark
1	Abubakar Abba Sanda	'Am very very happy today seeing southerners cheering a northerner'	This commenter expressed how happy he was seeing people from the southern Nigeria celebrating with those from the North
2	Sanusi Abdullahi	'All what you say as our say we don't have any country than Nigeria. Once again thank you our players.'	Sanusi reassured Nigerians from different ethnic groups that there is no other country preferable to the one called Nigeria.
3	Jibo Saidu	'I m glad to see my country united once again. We can't be more diversified than USA . why are they great? God bless you all'	Jibo noted that the game united Nigerians, and that made him happy.
	Usman Adamu	'The spirit of oneness shall continue flowing in our vein, one Nigeria'	Usman observed that the game made Nigerians see themselves as one. He further prayed for such oneness to continue
4	Rowland Nwogu	'Congratulations Nigeria. 'SOCCER'The only thing that can unite this nation'	To Rowland, football is the only things that could unite Nigeria
5	Olaosebikan Tunde	'It took the brilliant performance of a determined player to resuscitate the hope of close to 200 million Nigeria. Against all odds, refused to be limited by the lackluster performance of some players, nor be distracted in anyway, he remained focus and made us proud. Let our politician learn from this, we are interested on result not excuses'	Olaosebikan believed that the game succeeded in restoring the hope of the Nigerian populace. He attributed this to hard work. He finally urged the political class to learn from the Super Eagles players

6	Kanu Philip	'For the first time in a long while I am near happy'	Kanu reiterated that the match made him happy, after a long time
7	Exitto Geld	'Even if APC keep disappointing Nigerians thanks to God Super Eagles is giving us hope!'	APC stands for All Progressive Congress. It was the ruling party in Nigeria in 2018. Here, the commenter, Exitto maintained that while the government of Nigeria was not living upto expectations, the Super Eagles was giving hope to the masses.
8	Happiness Aghogho	'Musa my brother'	Happiness, the commenter was a female from Igboland, the ethnic group agitating for secession. While Musa was a Super Eagle's player from the northern part of Nigeria. He scored the two goals that won the team victory over Iceland. During this time, people from these two ethnic groups denounced any form of oneness with one another. But Nigeria's participation in the 2018 FIFA World Cup broke this ethnic dichotomy, as Nigerians saw themselves as one
9	Dee Dee Sangari	'Musa for president'	Dee advocated that Musa should be the president of Nigeria.
10	Mazi Chukwuemeka		Mazi posted a campaign poster of Musa vying for the president of Nigeria under a political party called APGA. APGA stands for All Progressive Grand Alliance. It was formed in 2003 by some political leaders in South East Nigeria. The slogan of the party is Nkea bu nke anyi. An Igbo world which means 'this is ours.' One of the founding members of the party was Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. Ojukwu lead the Igbo people in the Nigerian-Biafran war fought between 1967-1970. Since then, he was seen as the leader of the Igbo people. He used APGA to contest for Nigeria's president in 2003 and 2007. This political party has since its formation

			been seen as the Igbo party. By making a poster of Musa campaigning for Nigeria's president under APGA, Mazi was painting a picture of one Nigeria where one could come from any of the divides and freely associate with others under any legitimate platform.
11	Yakubu Yahaya	'So you think Nigeria is actually divided? Look at the line up of yesterday game. Not less than 70% were from the eastern part of Nigeria. Did you COMPLAIN? Did you even care to notice? No! When Ahmed Musa scored the first goal, was it only the Hausa people that celebrated? Were the Igbó and Yoruba people sad? Did they protest? When he scored the second goal. Did anybody complain why it's only an Hausa man that is scoring? No! You know why nobody cares about these things? Because we were ALL after the GOAL! One VICTORY! One VISION! The problem of Nigeria is never our diversity but lack of corporate and formidable national vision. When you have a goal, a vision, nobody cares where anybody is from! The greatest harm that our leaders have done is to succeed in making us believe we are divided. No we are not! They are the ones who don't have goals, visions solid and attractive enough to bring us together. Trust me, our diversity is strength and not a disaster. We must take deliberate steps to knock unfortunate and 'visionless' leaders out. Then, we can have the true and grand celebration'	Yakubu through his comment believed that the joy and celebration from Nigerians were because through football, the people had one goal, which was victory. The goal made the ethnic identities irrelevant. He recommended a Nigeria with one goal and vision as obtainable in football.

More to the foregoing, there were other reactions from online forums, facebook posts,

and whatsapp statuses. Table 4 below shows these reactions

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**Table 4 -** This table shows a collection of reactions of Nigerians from different social media on their belief that Nigeria's involvement in the 2018 FIFA World Cup was a tool for national cohesion

S/n	Media names of Commenters/ Posters	Unabridged Comment/Post	Social Media platform	Remark
1	Jaytel	'If only we can unite as a people to wrestle power from these corrupt leaders of ours (the way we do when watching Nigerian matches) irrespective of tribe, religion or party affiliation.....this country will be a better place. Yet to see a Nairalander call Ahmed Musa names..... terrorist, cattlerarer, Fulani etc Or call Nigeria a zoo within the last few hours.'	Comment on Nairaland post made on June 22, 2018 on the headline: Nigeria Vs Iceland: World Cup (2 - 0).'	Jaytel recommended that Nigerians should unite, same way they do during such football Matches as 2018 FIFA World Cup. According to him, football limits social and ethnic differences and me callings.
2	Tunagee	'My problem with Nigeria is that we are not united; ethnic, religious, tribal sentiments and killings up and down; but when football reach now, all of us go dey form 'one'. We can't be pretending to be one when our national football team is playing in an international tournament, and then keep killing ourselves due to differences in religion, tribe, ethnicity etc'	Comment on Nairaland post made on June 22, 2018 on the headline: Nigeria Vs Iceland : World Cup (2 - 0).'	Tunagee decried the fact that Nigerians bury their differences during football matches, but afterwards, they resort to ethnic antagonism. He advocated for the oneness of the country to goeyond football periods.
3	Barney	'Now we are one Nigeria later we will start fighting each other because of politics.'	Comment on Nairaland post made on June 22, 2018 on the headline: Nigeria Vs Iceland: World Cup (2 - 0).'	To Barney, people remember that they are united under the umbrella name, Nigeria during football matches, while politics divides them.
4	Saso Otuas	'I am proudly Naija, in less than 20 minutes Musa made Nigerians more happier [sic] than Buhari in 3 years'	Comment on Vanguard Newspaper facebook post made on June 24, 2018 on the headline 'Nigeria Vs Iceland: Technical Transformation, Sacrifice by Mikel, Moses helped- Rohr.'	Saso confessed that the game made Nigerians happier than the president of the country, who according to him had done nothing of such in the past three years of his administration.

5	Joshua Anyanwu	'The only time I feel good being a Nigerian is during football matches...we can't be more united than now'	Whatsapp status made on June 23, 2018	Joshua confessed that football is the only thing that made him happy as a Nigerian
6	LadyFreshLove	'My happiness is that with d world cup starting tomorrow there will be peace everywhere'	Comment on a whatsapp group on June 13, 2018	This commenter predicted on the eve of FIFA World Cup that the kicking off of the tournament meant that the various agitations from different parts of Nigeria would guarantee peace within the period.

Apart from the online views captured above, cases of good rapport were witnessed among people viewing matches at same public centers. For instance, after Ahmed Musa scored his second goal in the 75<sup>th</sup> minutes against Iceland, one of the spectators, De-More declared to pay for the fees of all the Hausa fans who watched the game in the same center with him. He further disclosed that he was a pro-Biafra agitator, but the fact that the 'Hausa man'- Musa could make him happy through scoring two games was never imagined.

Another spectator, Joshman approached an Hausa man, Ali who was the most prominent Suya (Kebab) maker in the locality, paid for all the Suya he had so everyone, irrespective of ethnic group could have some share.

Afterwards, he revealed that he had to buy off the Suya as a way to encourage 'Hausa brothers.' At Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria, the trend was the same. For instance, Ade, a Yoruba commercial bus driver offered to convey all the Igbo and Hausa students shuttling from Abakaliki, the state headquarter to Alex Ekwueme Federal University, without charging for fare. He granted that as a Yoruba man who believed in the disintegration of Nigeria, his orientation changed when he saw 'nationwide jubilation' that greeted the Super Eagles' victory. A student of University of Nigeria, Nnanyereugo disclosed that he used to preach the message of disintegration of Nigeria, but with the outcome of the match, he would desist from such.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In 2018, the Super Eagle's of Nigeria made her sixth appearance in the FIFA World

Cup competition. This was at a period bedeviled by series of secessionist agitations, ethnic profiling and terrorism in different parts of the country.

Interestingly, the participation of the team in the tournament blurred the lines of divides, and temporarily suspended the series of agitations. It further created a spirit of national identity, oneness and national cohesion among Nigerians. Inasmuch as the impact was short-lived, it serves as an example of the roles of football in creating national identity and reawakening national consciousness and cohesion.

This study recommends that the series of global crises, wars and identity questions could be arrested using football.

This could be done through a skillful inclusion of football as a technique in nation building exercises. This research suggests to various government officials and policy makers to employ football (which is a global culture) in building formidable nations, patriotic citizens and in consolidating peaceful coexistence.

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