Names | A Journal of Onomastics

The Malditas, The Filipinas, and *The Azkals:* A Socio-Onomastic Examination of Nicknames used for the Philippine Women's and Men's National Football Teams

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ans-names.pitt.edu
ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web) Vol. 73, No. 3, Fall 2025 DOI 10.5195/names.2025.2811

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This journal is published by Pitt Open Library Publishing.

Abstract

Nicknames in sports can serve a wide range of social and semantic functions. Assigning nicknames to athletes and teams can allow fans to identify with them. Such names can also become symbolic resources that fans and teams turn to when asserting their identity. Nicknames in sports come to convey varied meanings and interpretations understood within a set of contextual properties. This paper fills an empirical gap and investigates nicknames of national sports teams used in Southeast Asia. The investigative focus is on the nicknames of the Philippines men's and women's national football teams. Employing Leslie and Skipper's socio-onomastic framework, this investigation reveals that, despite a certain degree of arbitrariness of nicknaming national teams, these names reflect aspects of gender performance for the women's team, and reinforce pervasive cultural narratives of the underdog for the men's football team. At the same time, these nicknames highlight issues around identity politics for both gendered teams. The paper concludes that the use of these nicknames and their acceptance, or rejection, can be a political act negotiated between the namer and the named.

Keywords: nicknames, football, socio-onomastics, Malditas, Filipinas, Philippines

1.Introduction

In February 2024, the newly elected football[1] administration in the Philippine's Men's National Football Team (PMNFT) announced that they would no longer be using *The Azkals* as the nickname of the national team (Carandang 2024; Leyba 2023; PFF 2023). A similar fate had already prior befallen the Philippine's National Women's Football Team (PWNFT) when its moniker changed from *The Malditas* to *The Filipinas* . This change took place as the PWNFT was preparing for the 2022 Asian Football Club (AFC) Asian Women's Cup qualifiers in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (Felix 2022; Rile 2021). Where the PMNFT was concerned, the administration opined that the nickname was racially divisive in that it highlighted players of Filipino decent who were born overseas and left out the locally born indigenous players (Terrado 2024). Where the name change of the PWNFT was concerned, the administration claimed that "maldita" carried negative connotations: in Spanish and Portuguese, "maldita" means "condemned" or "damned", and in Tagalog, it means "brat" (Felix 2022). The Federation therefore held the opinion that the moniker risked demeaning the national team players as they prepared for their maiden appearance at the 2023 Women's World Cup sponsored by FIFA [Fédération Internationale de Football Association or 'International Federation of Association Football'] (Morilla 2022). The irony, however, is that the moniker *Filipinas* equally carries certain negative constructions: for some speakers, the term is tied with the negative stereotype of a Filipino woman who is a nanny (Amrith 2010), a nurse (Pratt 1999), a mail-order bride (Constable 1997; Ricordeau 2017), and/or the "exotic gold-digger" (Jimenez 2024).

Morphologically, the name, *Filipina*, is the female equivalent of *Filipino*, a native of the Philippines. In everyday common language, *Filipino* can refer to both a native of the country and the national language: a linguistically engineered language that was first called "Pilipino" (Clampitt 2015). According to Tupas (2015), the name *Pilipino* was originally used as an alternative to *Tagalog* which had become associated with the language of the urbanized citizenry as opposed to the rural population residing in the regional provinces. Later, ***P**ilipino* became ***F**ilipino*. The letter 'F' was used to represent sounds found in some non-Tagalog languages (Tupas 2015). Ultimately, the Filipino language was promoted as a unifying national language in response to the dominance of English, but this movement also came at the price of disregarding the country's natural diversity of local languages and cultures. While the PWNFT's use of *Filipina* is associated with a person rather than a language, it cannot be denied that the name still carries with it the emotional and social baggage of the country's struggle for national identity (Clampitt 2015).

Changing the nickname of a national team is not uncommon. In Kenya, for instance, a petition was made to the Office of the Ministry of Sports in 2022 to change the nickname of the national men's football team, *The Harambee Stars*. The petitioner argued that the nickname was obsolete, having been coined in the 1960s with the introduction of the national motto, "Harambee", meaning "collective endeavor" (Nyende 2022). The motto was popularized by the first President of the country, Jomo Kenyatta, and was used to rally the citizenry around the nation-building agenda after the country gained its independence from Britain on June 1, 1963, "Madaraka Day" (Owiti 2014). According to the petitioner, a new moniker would better convey the daring attitude of the new age. Suggestions for a replacement nickname included many references to the wild animals native to the country (e.g., *The Tsavo Simbas*, *The Mara Lions*, and *The Amboseli Cheetahs*) (Nyende 2022). This petition was not the only attempt at changing the nickname of Kenya's national football team. In 2017, a petition was lodged with the Kenyan Parliament. Given the team's poor performances, the

ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web) Vol. 73, No. 3, Fall 2025 DOI 10.5195/names.2025.2811

petitioner argued their name besmirched the altruistic essence of the national motto (Kyanda 2017). The petitioner, therefore suggested the team moniker be changed to reference another wild animal, *The Wildebeest*.

In the United States of America, several sports teams and franchises have stopped using names that reference Native Americans. Stanford University changed its team nickname from the *Indians* to *Cardinals*, while the University of North Dakota dropped the imagery, mascots, and nicknames associated with their former nickname, the *Fighting Sioux* (Jensen 1994). *The Washington Redskins* of the National Football League had its federation trademark protection rights stripped after a series of court cases filed by groups of Native Americans who sought injunctions on the use of *Redskin*s as an offensive, pejorative, racial slur (Tobin 2020). Scholars note that using Native American references for team monikers might seem quaint, but to others, such names help to perpetuate racist stereotypes about ethnic minorities (Black 2002; Tovares 2002; Staurowsky 2000; Fenelon 1999; Nuessel 1994). As Leslie and Skipper (1990) explain, certain nicknames may become socially disfavored "as they communicate uncommon, unrecognizable, or even discredited forms of classification" (277). Sport team nicknames may therefore reflect the way people utilize language in reaction to the cultural norms that surround them, as well as the meanings and attributes common to them(Wilson 2021; Olimat et al. 2012).

In the context of nicknames, the namer may employ illocutionary acts to infer an intended meaning behind a specific nickname. By contrast, a namer's perlocutionary act refers to the consequence of the name on the person it is intended for. According to Adams (2009), in this regard, "nicknames distribute power within a social group: they can be imposed, or they can be used by agreement between namer and named" (81). As Negrea-Busuioc et al. (2021) argue, nicknaming practices are therefore "optional, transient, fluid and, more importantly, sensitive to the cultural context in which they appear" (276) in which the power of naming is seen as a negotiated political act that provides a basis for their classification.

2.Classification of National Football Team Nicknames

One approach to classifying sports team nicknames is to draw from a team's history. For example, the British football club Manchester United replaced the Club's original nickname, *The Busby Babes*, with *The Red Devils* following a 1958 airplane crash in Munich, Germany, which killed, among other others, eight key players and three officials (Manchester United 2023). The Club's new nickname was based on similar one given to a local rugby team. French journalists dubbed the team *Les Diables Rouges* 'The Red Devils' following the their impressive performance in a 1934 tournament (Bonn 2021). According to Bonn (2021), the football team's new nickname not only avoided the association with the airline tragedy, it was also perceived as being more intimidating than the more timid-sounding *Busby Babes*. Like the term "Diables" or "Devils", nicknames often employ metaphors to communicate a common set of culturally significant symbols that reflect emotion, knowledge, and experience. On an ontological level, metaphors are based on perceived physical and material entities (Lakoff & Johnson 2003) that are used to convey particular traits of objects (Todor 2017). Where sports team nicknames are concerned, "one of the sources of metaphor, and hence one of the mechanisms by which our communal reality is mediated, is the world of sport" (Segrave 2000, 48).

In an analysis of the nicknames for the football teams which played in the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, Awad (2012) notes that nine teams (28%) used animal metaphors, including mythical beings such as North Korea's horse, *Chollima*, and Slovenia's dragon, *Jonda*. The use of animal metaphors can also reflect prowess and power. For instance, the nickname of Angola's national men's football team, *The Palancas Negras* 'Black sable antelopes' makes metaphoric reference to the animal's "large size, athleticism and rarity; apparently the only one of its kind in the world and only found in Angola" (Mambwe & Da Costa 2015, 56). Similarly, the nickname for the Australian men's national football team, *The Socceroos*, is a portmanteau of "soccer" and "kangaroo", a marsupial that is unique to the country.

The use of animal metaphors can also communicate "varying cultural history of each team" (Feng, Shuyue, & Cheng 2020, 67). For example, England's use of *The Three Lions* refers to the three blue lions passant guardant that was once a royal emblem of the house of Plantagenet in the 12th century under King Richard I. The emblem is based on the King's moniker "The Lion Heart". The passant guardant remains a Royal symbol to date (Lochun 2021). The table below provides a general classification of team nicknames and their metaphoric reference.

DOI 10.5195/names.2025.2811 Vol. 73, No. 3, Fall 2025 ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web)

Table 1: Illustrative Examples of Men's National Football Team Metaphor Nicknames and Their Metaphoric Classifications

Classification	National Team	Country
Animal	*The Super Eagles*	Nigeria
	The Elephants	Ivory Coast
	The Atlas Lions	Morocco
Color	*Canarinho* 'Yellow Canary Bird'	Brazil
	gli Azzurri /le Azzurre 'Light Blue'	Italy[2]
	La Albiceleste 'The White and Sky Blues'	Argentina
	Les Tricolores 'The Three Colors'	France
	Les Bleus/Les Bleues 'The Blues'	France
	All Whites	New Zealand[3]
	Verde-amarela 'Green and Yellow'	Brazil
Plants	*Las Cafeteras* 'The Coffee Growers'-	Colombia
	The Cedars	Lebanon
Pop Culture	*The Reggae Boyz*	Jamaica[4]

Drawing on the classifications of team nicknames, it is clear that many sports team nicknames are suggestive of desired characteristics which, according to Mambwe and Da Costa (2015), may not necessarily reflect the performance of the team per se. Team monikers are essentially symbols for identification that people rely on to make meaning. By adopting a socio-onomastic approach, it is possible to examine the social, cultural, and situational contexts in which such names are created and used (Ainiala & Östman 2017; Hough 2016). Leslie and Skipper (1990) therefore recommend a theoretical framework for rigorous analysis of nicknames that involves the following three strategies: 1.) continued documentation of nicknames and their origins; 2.) analysis of the nicknames by positing potential classification categories for the names; and 3.) analysis of the conditions under which the names are used. The next section employs Leslie and Skipper's (1990) framework to investigate the nicknames of the Philippine Women's and Men's National Football Teams.

3.Etymology of Nicknames of the Philippine Women's and Men's National Football Teams

3.1 The Malditas and The Filipinas

The PWNFT was organized in the early 1980s following a directive by the AFC calling for all member associations to establish women's teams under their respective national football federations (Dorai 1983). In 1985, the PWNFT participated in their first international competition at the 13th Southeast Asian Games (SEAG) in Thailand. This event was also the first time a women's football competition was included in the regional sports event. The nickname, *Malditas*, was given by the team's coach, Ernie Nierras, as the squad prepared for the 23rd edition of SEAG in 2005. The name was reportedly well received by the sports fans in the Philippines (Verora 2022).

The word "maldita" enjoys widespread use in the Spanish-speaking world where it has both positive and negative connotations. In the Dominican Republic, for example, it is added to strengthen profanities used in anger to indicate that the named is driven by demonic forces. A more positive usage is displayed by the Mexican band, *La Maldita Vecindad y los Hijos del Quinto Patio* 'The Damn Neighborhood and the Sons of the Fifth Patio'. Often called simply *Maldita Vecindad*, this band is one of the pioneers of Spanish rock that formed in the mid-1980s. In Spain, the consumer protection group, *Maldita*, guards against misinformation and fake news through, among others, collecting and fact-checking hoaxes. In the archipelago nation of the Philippines, the frequent use of the term "maldita" is thanks to three centuries of Spanish colonialism from 1565 to 1898. However, in 2021, the *Malditas* nickname was changed to *The Filipinas* as the team prepared for the qualifiers of the 2022 AFC Asian Women's Cup. The new name was suggested by the new team coach, Marlon Maro (Todecilla 2023). The name change was not universally accepted, however. For example, sports commentator Tom Ley (2023) indicated that *Malditas* was a more appropriate name since it was more intimidating than *The Filipinas*.

ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web) Vol. 73, No. 3, Fall 2025 DOI 10.5195/names.2025.2811

3.2 Etymology of The Azkals

Unlike the nicknames of the PWNFT which were created by coaches, the nickname of the PMNFT, *The Azkals*, was suggested in 2005 by "a handful of avid online soccer fans in the country" (Rehal 2013, 78) as the team prepared for the 23rd edition of SEAG in Thailand in 2005 (Ortiga 2011). The outcome of the poll was the selection of *Asong Kalye*, which literally translated into 'street dog' in English. The metaphor was selected due to the desirable traits of mongrels (e.g., their resilience, survival instincts, loyalty, and never-say-die attitude) (Rehal 2013).

The name, *Asong Kalye*, was eventually shortened to *Azkal*. The popularity of this new name was heightened by its resemblance to "azul" the Spanish word for the color "blue", which also spears on the Philippine national flag.[5] This new moniker eventually stuck and became the name of choice in mainstream media (Limpag 2011). This development is not unusual. As Morgan, O'Neill, and Harré (1979) contend, "nicknaming systems [. . .] have their origins in small groups and [. . .] play such an important part in their social organization" (15). Moreover, as Adams (2009) notes, even in cases where names are initially perceived as negative, they are likely to be used "in spite of its obviously pejorative connotation, until you know a better name by which to call the referent" (82).

4. Classification and Conditions in using *The Malditas*, *The Filipinas*, and *The Azkals*

4.1 The Malditas and the Filipinas

The nicknames of the PWNFT, *Maltidas* and *Filipinas*, are both classified in terms of human traits. According to Roy (2023), the moniker *Malditas* harkens to the terms use to describe a person who possesses a feisty, bratty, and combative demeanor. Marielle Benitez Javellana, a former team captain, attributes the nickname to the team's combative and feisty playing style or "palaban" in Tagalog (Nacino 2012). The *Malditas* nickname came about when the younger-aged players called the senior players "tanders", which is Tagalog slang for the word "matanda" meaning "an elderly person". The senior players, in turn, retorted by calling the younger players "maldita" which in the local slang refers to a feisty female who does not conform to cultural expectations. This image was symbolically reflected in the team's unofficial logo: the silhouette of a woman skillfully performing a tactical scissor kick.

The change from *Maltidas* to *Filipinas* was driven by the desire to evade the perceived negative connotation of the word "maldita". The team manager, Jeff Cheng, argued that the nickname, *Filipinas*, was more appropriate as it stressed the feminine beauty of the team (Todecilla 2023). The gendered construction of Filipina femininity, reflected in the nickname of *Filipinas*, is further symbolically represented in the team's unofficial logo marked by an image of a "sampaguita" 'Arabian jasmine', the national flower of the Philippines (National Museums of the Philippines 2021), with the colors of the national flag. The use of the sampaguita symbolically represents the essence of Filipina feminine identity which is socially constructed as pure and beautiful. Interestingly, the logo of the Japanese women's national football team, "The Nadeshiko Japan" also uses a flower—in this case, a pink carnation called the "nadeshiko". According to Mandujano (2014), this imagery represents certain feminine qualities considered desirable in Japanese women: modesty, gracefulness, gentleness, and subservience to men. Female Japanese athletes are therefore expected to be "dutiful daughters" who encourage young girls and women to play sports as way of performing one's civic and national duty (Ho 2014). According to Ho (2014) the power of such messages means that "nationalistic discourse [on female athletes] cannot occur without simultaneously negotiating femininity" (176). By contrast to the promotion of demure femininity in the naming of Japan's women's football team, the name for the men's team, the *Samurai Blue,* symbolize opposing, masculine, ideals (Mandujano 2014). Though different, both of the names *Yamato nadeshiko* and the *Samurai Blue*, as Ikeda (2014) argues, are "manifestation of the longevity of gender-biased idioms and images" (103).

In the Philippines, the patriarchal influence in women sport, exemplified in the nicknaming of the PWNFT, must be seen within the context of gender discourse that portrays "a harmonious family, obedient to the father" (Merklejn 2013, 248). The consequences of such unequal power relations, manifest by the nicknaming of the PWNFT by male coaches, include the dissemination of certain values such as "father knows best" and "he is always right" (Merklejn 2013, 248). This construction of an male-idealized femininity contrasts against Mary Madgalene, "the other Maria", who is deemed a "sinful girl" (Panday 2026) who is essentially a "maldita".

DOI 10.5195/names.2025.2811 Vol. 73, No. 3, Fall 2025 ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web)

Additionally, majority of the national team members are foreign-born and mixed-race Filipinos. Eighteen out of the twenty-three PWNFT players at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup were born in the United States. For that reason, in the media, the PWNFT was sometimes called "the other American team" or a team with an "American flavor" (Guito & Honderich 2023; McIntyre 2023). According to the football's governing body of football, FIFA,[8] players are permitted to play for a country where they are eligible for citizenship whether through birth, descent, or residency (FIFA, 2021). Nevertheless, the public perception of the "foreignness" of the PWNFT attests to a binary construction of a Filipino identity. On the one hand, it is constructed as dynamic and fluid; and on the other as fixed by geographical location and ethnicity (Ponce de Leon 2018; Rehal 2016).

The duality of *The Filipinas* performing femininity and nationalism is made against the projected image of *Maria Clara*, the female protagonist in José Rizal's 1887 work of fiction, *Noli Me Tangere* 'Touch Me Not', "a beloved work of literature that has long been read as one of the foundational texts of Philippine nationalism" (Cruz 2012, 1). According to Ellwood-Clayton (2006), the character of "Maria Clara" symbolizes the virtues of a noble Filipina woman—a an idealized character that, according to Panday (2016), comes from the Spanish-influence on the Philippines that still has power today through the omnipotence of Christianity in the nation. Peracullo (2017) notes that the Virgin Mary "looms large as the image of a "good" Filipina, in both cultural and religious landscapes in the Philippines; an imagery [that] points specifically to the weak or passive woman, who is represented by a satirical character named Maria Clara" (139). As Peracullo (2017) argues, the Roman Catholic Church reinforces such an imagery in the form of "marianismo mentality": like Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, women are to be domestic, passive, chaste, self-sacrificing, and respectful of patriarchal values (Nuñez et al. 2015; Niemann 2004). In her symbolic essence, the character "Maria Clara" comes to represent the marianismo idealism of Filipina femininity constructed as "both delicate and strong, graceful and able, compassionate and courageous" (Lazam 2006, 163).

Against that background, the nickname *Filipinas* makes reference to an essentialized physical and behavioral standard: women who are valorized for their beauty, infantilized, and held in high moral esteem for their sacrifice (Aguilar 1989). From a feminist perspective, the nickname aligns with Butler's (1988) concept of gender performance which tends to "compel the body to conform to a historical idea of 'woman' by inducing the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to a historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (522).

By the same token, the biracial identity of the team players aligns with the representation of "Maria Clara", who herself was a "mestiza", an incarnate of the "perfect equilibrium between two races" (Sanchez 2015, 7). As such she is expected to maintain "an identity fixed by location and acted out in culture" (Ponce de Leon 2018, 1302). Zea Asis (2025) argues that the image of "Maria Clara" "reinforced the suppressive and sexist views of what it meant to be a Filipina in the 20th century, leaving most women in the wake of the Spanish colonization to adhere to false beliefs about themselves". These biracial Filipinas were supposed to be inspirational, caring, providers, "not instigators and even less actors" (Sanchez 2015, 8). In other words, they were not to be "malditas", figuratively or literally. Thus, despite their "foreignness", the biracial players in the PWNFT are expected to "treasure the heritage left by her ancestors, heroes, and heroines" (Lazam 2006, 163). *The Filipinas* is therefore constructed along expectations of one performing their gender which is a "weighty nationalistic task" (Cruz 2012, 1).

A critical reading of the character and representation of "Maria Clara" as an "oriental decoration with downcast eyes and a pure soul"(Chapter 5 Rizal, 2006) is also a cautionary critique that warns against the consequences of blind obedience, passivity, and the suppression of women's agency. The feminist movement in the Philippines challenges the gendered representations of femininity in the Philippines represented by the images and values of "Maria Clara" and the "marianismo" inspired by the Virgin Mary. As Panday (2016) argues, there is fluidity in gender roles where the "Manila girl" gives credence to the virtuous construction of "Maria Clara" while still positioning herself as forward-thinking and cosmopolitical. From a deconstructist perspective, therefore, the continuous reference to *Malditas* deliberate deflects from patriarchy "as a vital step towards undoing the privileges that men [or the patriarchal system] enjoy" (Williams 2006, 337). As Adams (2009) notes, "offensive nicknames are often taunts, attempts by namers to construct power by using them, daring the nicknamed to respond" (88).

4.2 The Azkals

The Azkals has two references. First, it is a somewhat pejorative reference to the biracial identity of the players scouted from the Filipino Diaspora. At the height of their popularity, the PMNFT were largely comprised of foreign-born Filipinos of mixed-race, also referred to as "heritage players". The presence of these players stirred much debate. On the one hand, there were those who consider the construction of Filipino identity as dynamic and fluid. On the other hand, there were those who view Filipino identity as fixed by geographical location and ethnicity (Ponce de Leon 2018; Rehal 2016). The choice of the nickname, *The Azkals,* continuously evoked the politics of identity and belonging between the native born "pure"

ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web) Vol. 73, No. 3, Fall 2025 DOI 10.5195/names.2025.2811

Filipinos, and the foreign-born "mixed" Filipinos. This debate hounded *The Filipinas* during their World Cup participation in 2023. The presence of this controversy demonstrates that the Filipino's self-image is not static in that it can be as varied as their backgrounds that come to define them (Yacat 2005; Enrique 1977). The reference to *The Azkals* thus serves as a gateway into the national imagination, for as Benedict Anderson (2006) assserts, "football is also about belonging, community and identity [. . .]. It's about being part of something" (Berliner, Stimson, & Clavane 2019, 6). The decision by the football federation to drop the name *The Azkals* was thus rationalized in an effort to deviate from the politics of identity to one that encompasses a sense of a singular united Filipino identity (Carandang 2024). This development attests to Adams (2009) point that the use of a nickname and its acceptance (or rejection) can be seen as a negotiated political act in which the nickname is a token.

The second metaphorical reference of *The Azkals* is a "street dog". This image underscores the cultural narrative of the underdog[6] which is pervasive in Philippine sport. At a micro level, the underdog status is emotionally laden for not only the spectator, but also the competitor. As a player, being in the position of an underdog can increase motivation and performance, despite the odds (Kim et al. 2008). Underdog competitors may play with abandon because they have nothing to lose, argue Elias and Dunning (1986). At a cultural level, the notion of an underdog encapsulates the society's history of colonial oppression. Part of a society's identity is facing "daunting obstacles" (Kim et al. 2008, 2570). In the cultural underdog narrative, the "small guy usually ends up winning in the end despite the odds" (Goldschmied & Vadello 2012, 34).

This narrative is prevalent in the colonial and post-colonial history of Philippines' revolutionary war of 1896–1898 against Spain; in the insurrection war of 1899–1902 against the USA; and the ousting of a powerful totalitarian regime via a people-powered revolution in 1986. It is this historical context which helps to explain the prevalence of the underdog motif in Philippine sport. There is, for example, the boxing icon, Manny Pacquiao, whose persona "was that of a routinely victorious underdog" (Bonhomme et al. 2020, 574). Within Filipino basketball, teams are often described as being "the underdog" when they enter international competitions with larger, more established teams (Antolihao 2015). The "Barangay Ginebra", for example, a basketball team in the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) league, took on underdog status as they tried to "fight it out till the end" mantra (Antolihao 2010).

The Azkals also used this powerful cultural narrative. This became particularly clear during the "Miracle in Hanoi" (Ramos 2019; Olivares 2016) when the team emerged victorious over the host and defending champions, Vietnam. It was during this time, in 2010, that the PMNFT managed to qualify for the semi-finals for the first time of the AFF Southeast Asian football championship. Since then, the PMNFT has prided itself on being an underdog that can cause upsets, defeating much higher ranked teams. Capitalizing on this reputation and making good on their name, in 2018, for the first time in the country's football history, *The Azkals* rose to reach their highest FIFA ranking of 133th, after qualifying for the 2019 Asian Cup, Asia's premier football competition (Ansis 2018; Orda 2018). Despite that success, the new PMNFT administration decided to discontinue the team's culturally significant nickname (Leyba 2023). As of the writing of this article, it remains unclear what new moniker will be given to the team.

Conclusion

In sports, team nicknames are arbitrary as a "result of complex social negotiations, learned, interpreted, and reified through socialization" (Leslie & Skipper 1990, 273). Nicknames become part of the wider brand identity repertoire developed by the team itself, or its community of fans (Negrea-Busuioc et al. 2021). Using a socio-onomastic lens, this paper has examined the gendered narratives that are enacted by the nicknames of the PWNFT attesting to Butler's (1988) concept of gender performance. The juxtaposition of *Malditas* and *Filipinas* as monikers seems to draw arbitrary, oppositional, binaries. The existence of both monikers, however, might not be so much evidence of an underlying cultural conflict, however, as the two names may simply reflect different sides of today's Filipino woman: one who can dutifully serve , while walking boldly as a competitor on the world stage. Where the PMNFT is concerned, the name *The Azkals* seems to draw similar arbitrary binaries between native and non-native identities. Yet, at the same time, there is cultural solidarity in the united position of an underdog. In our examination of the arguments used for the competing sports nicknames, we find an identity that forcibly splits itself into two and is somewhat resistant to cultural and social nuances. Thus, as Adams (2009) argues, the nicknaming examined for this article was found to carry a verdictive force that "judges, assesses, or ranks" (84), thereby attesting to the inherent political and social complexities negotiated by both the namer and the named.

DOI 10.5195/names.2025.2811 Vol. 73, No. 3, Fall 2025 ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web)

Notes

[1] "Association football", or simply "football" is synonymous with what US Americans and many Canadians call "soccer". According to Cunningham (2025), in the US, the sport was organized under the United States Football Association in 1910, which later changed its name to the *United States Soccer Football Association* in 1945.

[2] Italy's national men's and women's football teams are nicknamed by the color blue in reference to the official color of the House of Savoy, a monarchy which ruled Italy in the late 19th-early 20th century (Nolan 2018). Despite Italy transitioning from monarchical rule to a republic in 1948, and concurrently changing the design of its national flag to the current vertical green, white, and red stripes (Smyth 1948), the nickname *azzurri* remains a mark of national pride and a symbol of national identity (Nolan 2018).

[3] The name *The All Whites* refers to New Zealand's use of a white colored jersey. This practice began when the team prepared for a match against Chinese Taipei in the qualifiers for the 1982 World Cup (McMorran 2021). To avoid negative racial connotations, there are plans to replace the nickname and with a moniker that reflects the indigenous Maori language and culture (Wilson 2021).

[4] Jamaica's use of *The Reggae Boyz* celebrates the reggae music genre that originated in Jamaica in the 1960s (Ferguson et al. 2016).

[5] The Republic Act 8491 , also known as 'The Flag and Heraldic Code of the Philippines" decrees that the colors of the Philippine national flag are blue, white, and red. On the field of white, the flag also displays a sun and three stars in golden-yellow (Senate of the Philippines 1998).

[6] The term "underdog" can be traced back to a 19th century song by Hendrickson (1987), 'The Under Dog in the Fight'. The term comes from the fact that in a dog fight, the losing dog rolls over on its back to signal submission, while the winning dog towers over it (Frazier & Synder 1991).

Funding Disclosure Statement

This study was not supported by any funding.

AI Disclosure Statement

No AI Tools or Technology were used to conduct the research or write this article.

Conflict Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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DOI 10.5195/names.2025.2811 Vol. 73, No. 3, Fall 2025 ISSN: 0027-7738 (print) 1756-2279 (web)