

# Football: War by other means

IN the early 1800s, the German political strategist Carl von Clausewitz made the famous statement, "War is merely the continuation of politics by other means." Today, that statement could be slightly adjusted to read, "Football is merely the continuation of war by other means." As Europeans open their version of the Nation's Cup this weekend, we can see how from one perspective, that is very nearly the case, albeit incompletely.

Of the sixteen qualifiers for Euro 2000, eleven are members of the European Union. Many of these countries, such as Germany and France, Spain and Portugal, Norway and Sweden, were once adversaries. With increased European integration, however, enemies are now becoming countrymen, and so other avenues than warfare have to be found to carry on the old animosities in less dangerous ways. What better way than through sports, most especially football?

Some may say that the primary sign of a country's sovereignty and right to exist is membership in the United Nations. As a matter of fact, that is not necessarily the case. Some 'countries' - such as England or the Faroe Islands - that do not merit membership in the UN do merit membership in FIFA and play on an officially equal footing with other FIFA members in qualifying matches for major tournaments. From this perspective, then, having a national football team is one of the key signifiers of national identity, even for political entities not recognised by the UN. Nigeria, for instance, was a member of FIFA before it was a member of the UN.

As the 22 man unarmed armies of the 16 qualifiers for Euro 2000 take to the battlefields of the Netherlands and Belgium over the next few weeks, a lot of national pride will be at stake. Thus, even while Europe is becoming increasingly integrated, the fans of the individual national teams will show that it

## Wiebe Boer

Perspective of a Nigerian-American



will still be many decades before citizens of member nations of the European Union really see themselves as one country. In short, national football teams have become the shoulders on which nationalism is still carried. The success of your national team proves the strength and valour of your nation, much as armies might have done in the not so distant European past. Furthermore, national teams seem to exemplify that distinctive citizenship, nationality, and the nation-state itself still persist strongly even in the part of the world where borders are officially coming down.

So, the fanaticism likely to be associated with Euro 2000 certainly does seem to make a strong case that the nation-state is alive and well. Before we all agree with that however, let us take a look at African influences on the European championship.

Viewers of the tournament may be surprised to find a black man playing for Spain. Spain's sole black players is none other than midfielder Vicente Engonga, originally from Equatorial Guinea, Spain's erstwhile African

colony. Belgium too has drawn on her former African colony for two players - in form striker Emile Mpenza and his elder brother Mbo. Portugal, a country that has long relied on the brilliance of African players for international success has one player from Mozambique on the present squad and one from Angola. Jose Luis Vidigal, the player from Angola, is the younger brother of Lito, an international who plays for Angola rather than Portugal! Then of course, there is France, the country that won the World Cup with a lot of help from Africans - especially Zinedine Zidane of Algeria, and Marcel Desailly of Ghana.

France has long been known to poach Africans to play for them - beginning with Moroccan born Just Fontaine, the all time leading scorer in the World Cup. But, African teams have also benefited from players with French connections - Morocco's Mustapha Hadji and Cameroon's Patrick Mboma and Job Desire-Job for instance. Although they were raised in France and

could have played for that country, both opted to play for their country of ancestry. South African defender Pierre Issa is of Lebanese descent and was born in South Africa, but raised entirely in France. He only made it to the Bafana Bafana squad because of a chance discussion with a South African female footballer after he started toasting her in a bar.

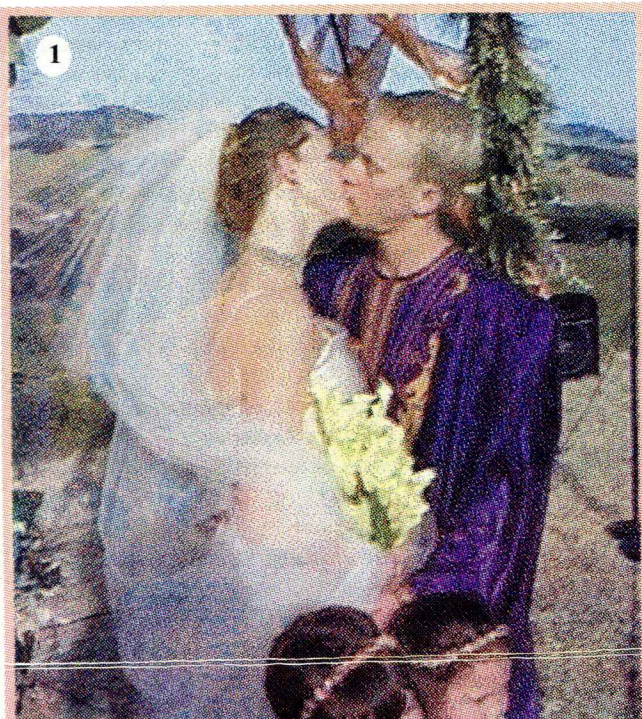
And France is not the only European country to raise players for African teams - Michel Dinzy, a player for DR Congo, was born and raised in Germany and had a difficult time communicating with his team mates at the 2000 Nation's Cup. One of the revelations of the tournament, Cameroon's Laurent Etame-Mayer, had a similar problem. Raised in Spain and fluent in Spanish, Mayer could hardly communicate with the rest of the team, although his brilliant team play on the field may have made you think otherwise.

This, then, is all to say that national team uniforms and colours mean far less than what fans may have us believe. Rather than exhibiting the strength of the nation state, national soccer teams show how fluid national identities really are, and how increasingly meaningless ancestry, race, and borders are becoming from country to country in the international arena.

Let me end by taking this

back to Nigeria. It is often said that football is the only arena that unites all Nigerians, and that the success of the Super Eagles is central to a sense of national pride. But who are the national team players? As opposed to many African and European teams, all of Nigeria's players at the present are indeed born in Nigeria, even while Nigerians are themselves playing for countries as diverse as the USA, Hungary, and Malta. But, almost none of Nigeria's national team play in their own country. Players like Celestine Babayaro have been playing abroad since they were 14, and it is likely that Nigeria's stars of the future after years of playing and living abroad will become increasingly distant from the Nigerians they supposedly represent back home.

In short, building a sense of national unity and pride on something as fragile as a national football team, always a dangerous prospect, will become increasingly nonsensical as the world continues to globalise. Rather than exhibiting the health of the nation state system, football shows how fluid the system is really becoming, and how borders are actually coming down. Just don't tell that to the England fans before they go out to play Germany at Euro 2000. Or to Nigerian fans next time the Super Eagles take to the field to play Ghana.



## Kevin Boer weds in California

Mr. Kevin Sumu'ila Boer, brother of our America-based columnist, Wiebe Boer and son of Dr. Jan and Frances Boer, formerly of Wukari, Taraba State and Jos, Plateau state got married May 20 this year to Theresa Hanneman of Fairfield, California, USA and daughter of Col. Mark and Willhelmina Hanneman on the Hanneman Ranch, twin sisters road, Suisin California. The babarigida's and kaftans were designed by Gloria Gomwalk of Jos, Nigeria,

made in Jos and flown to California by courier. According to Wiebe, the babarigas and kaftans were worn to include Nigeria, a country they love so much and where they've spent the greater part of their life, in the ceremony.

Pix 1: Kevin and Theresa, pix 2: Kevin (standing), Wiebe (middle front row), Kristar Evenhouse of Jos and Daven Maltz of South Africa and Pix 4: (L-R) Willhelmina, Mark, Theresa, Kevin, Frances and Jan.

