



An Onomastics Delve into Politics of Nicknames in Kenya

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Abstract

Over the years, the Kenyan political space has changed thanks to social media, with Kenyans on X, Tiktok and other digital platforms playing a key role in shaping the country's political discourse. One of the new traits that has emerged is the use of political nicknames. This study is an investigation on the origin and meaning of nicknames used to refer to popular politicians in Kenya. In the study, sixteen popular political leaders in Kenya from different regions were purposively sampled and a list of their political nicknames generated. Thereafter, qualitative analysis was done through questions and focused group discussions among third year students of linguistics at Kirinyaga University on what the names connote. The study adopts the associative theory of meaning which refers to the additional, subjective associations and emotions that a word carries beyond its literal description. From the study, it was evident that the nicknames of various politicians in Kenya vary greatly from one another. They are used to identify the politicians' characteristics focusing on their speech, behaviours, leadership traits, political choices and personal habits. These nicknames play a role in shaping politicians identity and how they are perceived by the voters. In the end, the study reveals that nicknames are significant in Kenyan political landscape, and sometimes politicians use them to endear themselves to voters while the electorates quite often use the same to deride and characterize them.

Subject Areas

Politics

Keywords

Connotation, Kenya, Nickname, Onomastics, Politics

1. Topic One

Names and natural kind terms have long been a major focus of debates about

meaning and reference. In the field of linguistics, onomastics deals with the study of proper names, especially the names of people and places. Time immemorial, naming of a child is a valuable cultural practice among many societies of the world. Whenever a child is born, the choice of his or her name becomes the first priority. The name bestowed gives identity to the child and a place in the society by distinguishing him or her from others. It is therefore a normal practice for every person to have a name that accords identity and a sense of belonging. Nonetheless, there has been a debate among linguists on whether personal names have meaning or it is merely a tag, a pointer which in itself has next to no meaning. While many agree names have references, they also see them as arbitrary words which may not reflect any thing inherit in the bearer since in many communities' child naming is done at birth. They are often shared by multiple individuals and may not be unique. [1] postulates that, the primary function of name giving activity is to distinguish the new born from others and that name giving has a referential function.

Nonetheless, according to [2] in many African societies names are symbolic. There are names given after a child's kinsmen, for instance, a grandfather and that makes relation strong. There are also those named after events surrounding a child's birth, for example, among the Kalenjin people of Kenya children are named according to the time of birth, with a few variations. Most people, however, have inherited their names from former relatives and ancestors. In the Kalenjin community of Kenya for example; male names often start with the letter "K" but may be abbreviated by omitting the prefix "Kip." Most girls' names start with the letter "C" but may also be abbreviated by omitting the prefix Chep. For instance, Kipkemei (Chepkemei): Born when there was a famine, Kipkesio (Chepkeshio): Born during the harvest., Kipketer (Chepketer): Born along the outer wall of the hut, Kipkirong, Kipkering (Chepkirong, Chepkering): Born after the older sibling had died, and Kipkorir (Chepkorir): Born when the chicken is crowing, before sunrise. The meanings of the names and circumstances in which they are chosen suggest that they are not mere linguistic phenomenon or arbitrary labels without any meaning whatsoever. They convey the social and cultural existence of the community.

Just like the Kalenjin naming system mentioned above, in many African societies names are rarely given to children randomly, but rather are carefully chosen by parents and relatives so as to reflect and reveal the social circumstances in which a baby is born. Therefore, socio-cultural factors play a major role in the selection and bestowal of personal names among many Kenyan communities. For instance, in the Agikuyu community, people name their kids based on gender and the family lineages of both parents. The community's traditions dictate that if the firstborn child is a girl, she will take a name from the mother's side, and if he is a boy, he will take a name from the father's side.

All the same, people acquire additional names in the course of one's life for various reasons. They could, therefore, "accumulate names alluding to character,

or even describing, various episodes in which they distinguished themselves”; in particular, the way in which they distinguished themselves. Names which an individual acquires in the course of life, being mainly descriptive phrases referring to character or deeds. These names are referred to as nicknames. A nickname is an informal often humorous name for a person that is connected with their real name, their personality or appearance or with something they have done [3]. According to [4] the main anthroponymic nominations, the identification means to distinguish a person in society, are nicknames.

Kenyans are a creative lot especially when it comes to baptizing politicians with nicknames. Some of these pseudo names stand out that we even forget the real identities. These additional, unofficial names of a person, used for the most accurate personal, evaluative characteristics of the referent and his identification in the community sometimes become the norm. While the process of acquiring new names is more or less spontaneous, these new terms tend to match with the way the politician acts or dresses. Usually, these monikers spread like wildfires and it sometimes increases their popularity among the voters in their jurisdiction while at the same time it may convey dislike and dissatisfaction among voters. Several studies have been conducted in Onomastics across the world, and in Kenya; nonetheless the author has not come across any study on the politics of nicknames in Kenya though they are quite widespread and carry a lot of social and political significance. This study therefore, sets out to identify the nicknames of sixteen purposively selected popular political figures in Kenya by describing their origin, meaning and connotations.

2. Topic Two

Naming is a means of identification and reference among people all over the world. The practice of naming is as old as humanity itself (Genesis 2: 20). [5] state that there are various kinds of naming in which personal naming is one. Names are given to individuals at birth and are typically used to identify a person in a formal or official setting. Nicknames, on the other hand, are informal names that are often given to individuals by friends, family, or colleagues as a term of endearment or as a way to show familiarity. According to [6], Nicknames are not just arbitrary symbols of identity, but can also signify status, power, achievement, privilege and meaningful social organization within a defined social context.

The main function of the name is to identify the person individually. Naming of a child is a valuable cultural practice in all societies of the world. Whenever a child is born, the choice of his or her name becomes the first priority. Various societies have different ways of getting names for their children [7]. While names are usually chosen by parents and hold a significant meaning, nicknames are often based on a person's personality, physical appearance, or a specific event. Both names and nicknames play a role in shaping a person's identity and how they are perceived by others. Some African communities had the system of naming according to the days of the week. For example, the Swahili of East Africa had names

like Mwajuma born on Friday, Esi born on Sunday, Khamisi born on Thursday and Jumaane born on Tuesday. Yoruba of West Africa had names like Bosede meaning born on Sunday. Other tribes used the order of birth, for instance the Khan of Ghana and the Swahili of East Africa. For example, Nkruma of Ghana meant he was born being the ninth in the family and Nsia was Sixth, Mosi meant first among the Swahili. Other tribes that used names with religious connotation were the Egyptians and the Chaga.

Moreover, names and nicknames are both used to identify individuals, but they serve different purposes and have unique attributes. While names are typically given at birth and are used in formal settings, nicknames are often informal and can be chosen or earned over time. Names are usually chosen by parents and have specific meanings or cultural significance. They can reflect family traditions, honor ancestors, or have religious connotations. In contrast, nicknames are often based on physical characteristics, personality traits, or inside jokes. They may not have the same depth of meaning as names, but they can be more personal and endearing. [8] upholds that, nicknames are expressions that identify a person and are different from the proper name of that person.

According to [1] the primary function of name giving activity is to distinguish the new born from all the others that have gone before, i.e. name giving has a referential function: a name is used to refer to an individual. As such, a name is little more than a label which distinguishes you from others. For this reason, name givers are more interested in “nice sounding” and even “unusual” names, rather than in the possible “meaning” if any of the names. While this assertion may be true with many modern parents, it’s worth noting that in African society naming carried great significance. Just like nicknames in modern society names are not mere arbitrary labels, but they are meaning bearing and based on many contextual considerations. In the traditional African set up names were rarely given to children randomly, but rather were carefully chosen by parents and relatives so as to reflect and reveal the social circumstances in which a baby was born.

[9] postulates that there are two categories of nicknames. The first category is nicknames that have a positive communicative and social intent. The speaker coins and uses it to express a positive attitude towards the bearer. This is supported by [10] who points out that the usage of these nicknames implies a positive emotional attitude towards the speaker. This positive emotional attitude can be expressed through the use of a nickname that shows affection or endearment [11]. Because of their positive communicative intent, positive nicknames are usually used to reflect solidarity power relations between the speaker and the bearer. Their usage is indicative of a need to express warmth and affection towards the bearer and to supply a common ground for communicators, or in some cases to create a sense of belonging between the user and the bearer. Positive nicknames are usually used vocatively because they are not meant to offend the bearer. Positive nicknames are semantically transparent, that is they do not carry any hidden offensive meanings. As a result, they are usually freely used to address the bearer with the

expectation that the bearer will approve of the nickname.

Nicknames with a negative communicative intent on the other hand, according to [11] are nicknames that speakers coin and use with a negative communicative intent in order to express lack of appreciation or a negative attitude towards the bearer. This kind of nicknames is used referentially without the bearer knowing the name or being uneasy with it. Since they are used among certain groups they become common currency among the members of a group which uses them. It should be noted, however, that in some cases these nicknames are used vocatively when the speaker consciously intends to offend the bearer.

Finally, nicknames are determinants of the power relations in a community. The fact that they can originate from the bearer's physical and personal characteristics; and that they are mostly used referentially, renders them an important tool in gaining insight into whether the speaker approves or disapproves of the bearer's characteristics and thus the positivity or negativity of the user's attitude towards the bearer. Monikers have been investigated extensively in different aspects [4] [8]-[14]. However, despite their richness in meaning and creativity, nicknames to Kenyan politicians, be it at the national or county levels, have attracted very little research. The aim of this article is to unravel the way in which nicknames given to politicians reflect and help create social realities in the Kenyan political landscape.

3. Topic Three

Language is a complex symbolic system that people use to communicate and to transmit their ideas. This study is grounded on the associative theory of meaning. Associative meaning is that type of meaning which a word conveys over and above its ordinary, basic or commonly shared sense. It is unstable, open-ended and variable in nature. Associative meaning can be influenced by sex, the experience of the speaker or hearer, the historical epoch in which the word is used, the society or the culture. To get at the associative meaning of an expression requires that both the speaker and the hearer must share a similar background knowledge. [15] has recognized five (5) sub-classes of associative meaning: connotative, collocative, affective, reflective and stylistic/social. The primary focus of this study is connotative meaning/meaning which an expression has by virtue of what it refers to over and above its purely conceptual contents.

[16] argue that connotative meaning is the real-world value a speaker associated with an expression. It is concerned with real world experience which an individual associates with an expression when he uses or hears it. It embraces both the conceptual meaning of an expression and the individual experience which he brings to bare upon what he/she communicates or experiences. Since nicknames are an integral part of human experience in many cultures in the world over, and some scholars believe that they have a cultural significance to the relevant society. This study explores the connotative meaning of nicknames given to politicians in Kenya and delves into the communicative intents associated with different expres-

sions as used to label prominent politicians in Kenya.

4. Topic Four

This study has used a descriptive research design which is largely informed by a qualitative research approach. The design as applied in this study aimed at providing detailed descriptions and explanations of the selected nicknames. [17] observes, the descriptive research design major purpose is description of state of affairs as it exists and researcher report's findings. This study entails a sixteen purposively sampled political leaders in Kenya. Ethnographic data for the study was elicited from both primary and secondary sources. The group of respondents comprised students, in their third year at university studying semantics. The students are drawn from different counties in Kenya as well as across the Kenyan political and dialectical divide.

The study used three main research techniques for data collection namely: introspection and document analysis, focused group discussions and online searches. Introspection was used because the researcher is a former Kenyan politician and understands many aspects of nicknames in Kenyan politics. Document analysis involved extraction of nicknames from different social media, such as X, Tiktok and Facebook as well as online blogs. Since the goal was to collect nicknames for key political leaders and establish related semantic and etymological information; focused group discussions were conducted in a semantics class to understand the motivations, sources, social consequences and perceptions of nicknames among the Kenyan populace.

Though nicknames have been considered to be informal over the years, contemporary realities however reveal that nicknames are used to foster solidarity, enhance group affiliation and offer feedback especially within social circles [13]. The Kenyan political space has been awash with nicknames coined by popular politicians or bestowed upon them. Politicians are given aliases that either relate to their personality or something major that they have done. In this article, we outline some of the hilarious nicknames given to top Kenyan politicians, their meaning and origin.

4.1. Subtopic A

William Kipchirchir Samoei Arap Ruto, is a Kenyan politician who is the fifth and current president of Kenya since 2022. Prior to becoming president, he served as the first elected deputy president of Kenya from 2013 to 2022. He previously served cabinet minister in different ministries and Member of Parliament. Of all Kenyan presidents and politicians none has attracted so many monikers like William Ruto. Since ascending to power, President William Ruto has been given numerous nicknames by Kenyans, reflecting his personality, leadership style, and political moves. The nicknames include;

Doyen: President Ruto got the name Doyen for his believed aptness in the political arena. His supporters viewed him as a political mastermind. Doyen means

the most respected and prominent person in a particular field. President Ruto was given the nickname owing to his political brilliance and wittiness that has seen him rise from an MP to be President, amid hurdles that include being charged at The Hague.

Uncle Willy: Dr Ruto was also referred to as Uncle Willy, after a young girl recited a poem titled “I’m I not lucky” to him thereafter coining Uncle Willy as his pet name. Out of admiration many Kenyans called him by the same name and he also seemed to like it.

Kasongo: The nickname itself comes from the song *Kasongo* by the Super Orchestra Mazembe, a renowned band originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The song’s lyrics tell the story of a woman pleading with her husband, Kasongo, to return to their marriage. The nickname “Kasongo” was thus born from this cultural fusion, with Kenyans using the catchy tune to satirically refer to President Ruto. Rather than rejecting the nickname or showing irritation, President William Ruto has chosen to embrace it with good humor.

Zakayo: Kenyans nicknamed Ruto “Zakayo” the Kiswahili translation of the Biblical character Zacchaeus, a no-nonsense chief tax collector from Jericho. Ruto earned the nickname over his penchant for introducing new taxes, which most Kenyans viewed as punitive. Ruto acknowledged the nickname but defended his tax policies, stating that it was Kenya’s only way out of the debt sinkhole the country was in.

Nabii: Just like Zakayo, the Nabii nickname alludes to religion, particularly Ruto’s strong affiliation with the church and his bold claim that he is a leader ordained by God. The President has made it a political habit to attend church services every Sunday, and is even building a church at state house. He has often used the Bible to defend some of his contentious policies, specifically on public debt.

Kaunda Uongoman: Unlike the other nicknames given to the Head of State, this particular one touched on his character and his sense of fashion as perceived by the public. Kaunda refers to Ruto’s adapted sense of fashion - wearing Kaunda Suits, a popular African wear, albeit renowned for its infamous links to dictatorship. Uongoman denoted that Kenyans perceived their leader as a liar, owing to the delayed fulfillment or perceived lack of delivery of his campaign promises.

Hustler: This nickname reflects Ruto’s narrative of rising from humble beginnings to political prominence. He often identifies himself as a “hustler,” connecting with ordinary Kenyans and emphasizing his commitment to empowering the underprivileged.

The Chief Hustler: An extension of the “Hustler” moniker, this title positions Ruto as the leader of the “Hustler Nation,” a term he coined to represent his political movement aimed at uplifting the youth and small-scale businesses.

El Chapo: Coined humorously after Ruto promised to help Nairobi acquire a chapati-making machine, this nickname became popular due to the memes that followed his statement.

Flying Man: Ruto earned the nickname due to his frequent international travels

on official State visits. Throughout his first term, the president has embarked on numerous foreign trips, sometimes consecutively, prompting Kenyans to ponder the tangible benefits they would reap from such excursions.

4.2. Subtopic B

Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta is a Kenyan politician who served as the fourth president of Kenya from 2013 to 2022. He is the son of Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president. Uhuru Kenyatta has been given numerous nicknames by Kenyans, reflecting his personality and leadership style. The nicknames include:

Kamwana: This is a Kikuyu phrase that loosely translates to a youthful person. The name was used to create the impression that Uhuru was young to retire from politics. For a long time Uhuru ignored the nickname Kamwana but towards his retirement he was quoted at a rally while addressing the youth; "After 10 years of service, you are no longer energetic. I am approaching 60 years and people still refer to me as Kamwana. Kamwana inafaa kuisha bana. "(We need to retire that name)" Kenyatta stated.

Jayden: Jayden is a popular name for boys. It's a favourite among modern parents. Many people believe the name is given to pampered and cool kids, who depend on their parents wealth. Kenyans described the former president as a political Jayden, who had lost touch with what ordinary Kenyans were going through.

Wamashati: The former president was given the name for wearing casual stylish shirts especially during his second term in office.

Wanjohi: The name is derived from the Kikuyu language, where "Wanjohi" means "one who is always happy." It may also refer to someone who loves alcohol.

4.3. Subtopic C

Raila Amolo Odinga is a Kenyan politician who served as the Prime Minister of Kenya from 2008 to 2013. He is the leader of Azimio coalition and has run for President of Kenya five times, with none of his attempts being successful. The Azimio leader is arguably the leading politician when it comes to nicknames. He gets a new nickname almost every other political season. Among his many political names, some of the most popular are:

Baba: "Baba" is a Swahili word that translates to father. The name came about in 2014 when Raila was in the United States for a trip. His supporters coined the name while informing him of the happenings in the country during his absence. Their statements would be preceded by the "baba while you were away" phrase before stating the issues they thought needed Raila's attention. Since then, the name has become one of his own, his supporters responding with "ndio baba" whenever he addresses them.

Tinga: Tinga is the Swahili word for tractor. It was the symbol for the NDP party with which Raila contested for the presidency in the 1997 general election. The nickname however got life in 2007 when the ODM boss contested for the presidency for the second time. Songs of praise and support for his bid have been

done referring to him as Tinga and even himself severally uses the name to furnish analogies like climbing Mt Kenya, which is symbolic of winning votes in Central Kenya.

Agwambo: Agwambo Perceived to be a spirit because of his unwavering presence on the political scene. Despite being jailed during the Moi regime, Raila came back to befriend Moi and brought him down tactically with his exit to form NARC Kenya which spelt a new beginning for Kenya from a perceived 24 years of his reign. Raila's resilience has been seen thereafter when he fell out with Kibaki and contested against his former ally in the 2007 General Election in which presidential results were disputed.

Rao: RAO It's an acronym of his name Raila Amollo Odinga and also a slang short form of Raila. His supporters use it to fondly refer to him.

Vitendawili: His frequent use of riddles, in Kiswahili vitendawili, during his campaigns earned him the name which has been frequently used by his critics, especially President Ruto and his United Democratic Alliance supporters, to address him. However, their antagonism has now been pacified through the formation of a broad-based government.

Jakom: Jakom is also a Luo term that refers to somebody who is holding the chairperson position, leading a group of followers, or simply a person in a position of power. Given that he comes from the Luo community, this term is commonly used to identify him as the leader of the tribe, leader of the Opposition, and the ODM party.

Peoples President: The title became famous after the controversial swearing-in at Uhuru Park where Raila Odinga was declared the people's president despite losing in a hotly contested presidential election in August 2017.

4.4. Subtopic Four

Geoffrey Rigathi Gachagua is a Kenyan politician who served as the 2nd deputy president of Kenya. He served from 13th September 2022 until his impeachment in October 2024. Gachagua also served as Member of Parliament for Mathira from 2017 to 2022. After impeachment he formed his own party DCP Kenya and became the party leader. His monikers include:

Riggy G: It was derived from his real name as a way of making it melodious. The name which was coined by one Ivy Chelimo impressed the DP and he embraced it. Gachagua remarked while embracing the name; "The young lady watched me during the deputy presidential debate with Martha Karua and thought my name was a bit difficult. She then decided to make it a little melodious and crafted Riggy G."

Wamunoro: After impeachment former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua continued with political consultative meetings at his Wamunoro private residence in Nyeri County during morning hours or as guests arrived. This earned him the nickname "Wamunoro" as his Wamunoro residence became a beehive of political activities.

4.5. Subtopic Five

Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka is a Kenyan politician who was the tenth Vice-President of Kenya from 2008 to 2013 and the last before the new constitution. Musyoka who is the party leader of Wiper Democratic Movement served in the government under the late President Daniel arap Moi and the late President Mwai Kibaki. He was an unsuccessful candidate in the 2007 presidential election, after which he was appointed vice-president by Kibaki in January 2008.

He is popularly referred as watermelon. The Wiper Party Leader was given the moniker over what many consider to be his indecisiveness when it comes to big political decisions and moments. In the past, Kalonzo has made u-turns on his political decisions, making many believe that he does not have a firm stand, thus his comparison to a watermelon that is green outside and red on the inside. “It was Raila who gave me the watermelon tag but there is no problem,” Kalonzo once remarked during a television interview.

4.6. Subtopic Six

Hassan Ali Joho is a Kenyan politician who is the Cabinet Secretary for Mining and Blue Economy in the Republic of Kenya. He is also the first Governor of Mombasa County.

He is popularly referred as Sultan. The name came about after former Mombasa Regional Commissioner Nelson Marwa hit out at Joho, over claims that he was acting like the region’s sultan. Following Marwa’s attack, Sultan became a moniker for the former governor. To date, he is widely known as Sultan.

4.7. Subtopic Seven

Mbuvi Gideon Kioko, is a Kenyan politician who served as the second Governor of Nairobi. He was removed from the office of the governor by a form of impeachment by the Senate of the Republic of Kenya on 17 December 2020.

He is popularly known as Mike Sonko or simply Sonko (Sheng for “rich person” or “boss”). The former Nairobi governor earned the name Sonko thanks to his flamboyant lifestyle that coupled with his philanthropic nature of caring for the less fortunate in society. Additionally, his nature of wearing gold rings and chains plus his gold-themed former Nairobi governor’s office cemented the name Sonko on his identity.

4.8. Subtopic Eight

Wycliffe Musalia Mudavadi is a Kenyan politician who is currently serving as Prime Cabinet Secretary of Kenya, since 2022. He is a former party leader of the Amani National Congress (ANC) and served as the seventh Vice-President of Kenya in 2002 under the presidency of Daniel arap Moi.

He is popularly referred as MaDVD which is a direct name that was derived from his name MuDaVaDi.

4.9. Subtopic Nine

Moses Masika Wetang'ula is the current Speaker of the National Assembly of Kenya, and leader of the FORD-Kenya party. Wetangula was elected to the National Assembly in the December 2002 parliamentary election, and has never lost in any of the election he has participated ever since. He was elected to the Senate of Kenya in 2013, representing Bungoma County, and became Minority Leader in the Senate of Kenya.

He is popularly known as Papa wa Roma. He was given the nickname owing to his cult-like following in Bungoma County. It is argued that Wetangula's directives are followed in Bungoma the same way Catholic faithful follow the directive of the Pope. Thus, the name Papa wa Roma, which is Swahili for Pope of Rome.

Martha Wangari Karua is a Kenyan politician. She is a former long-standing member of parliament for Gichugu Constituency and an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya. She was Minister for Justice until resigning from that position in April 2009. She has consistently fought for the protection of women's rights and improvements to the democratic process. Karua ran for presidency in 2013 under the Narc-Kenya ticket making her the third woman to run for the highest office, after Charity Ngilu and Wangari Maathai in the 1997 elections. She was picked to run for deputy president after being nominated as the running mate of presidential candidate Raila Odinga in the 2022 Kenyan general election.

Martha Karua is popularly known as Iron Lady. This is a name that is widely used to describe female leaders in the government as strong-willed. She is described as the Iron lady for her no-nonsense nature in the political world.

4.10. Subtopic Ten

Ferdinand Ndungu Waititu, also known as Baba Yao, is a Kenyan politician who served as the second governor of Kiambu County from 2016 to January 2020 when he was impeached by the Kenyan Senate. Waititu entered the national political scene in 2007 when he was elected as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Embakasi Constituency. His reign as Embakasi MP was littered with theatrics. Waititu clashed with police and alleged land grabbers. Videos of him hurling stones at police officers went viral, an act that earned him the monicker 'Baba Yao' from his constituents.

4.11. Subtopic Eleven

Paul Kimani Njoroge, popularly known as Kimani Wamatangi is the third governor of Kiambu having served as the Senator for the same County. He is known by the Kiambu people for helping them get water tanks. The name Wamatangi means "of the tanks".

4.12. Subtopic Twelve

Hon. Francis Mwangi popularly known as Wa Iria is the party leader of Usawa Kwa Wote Party and the first Governor of Murang'a County. He was credited with

reviving the new Kenya Cooperative Creameries (New KCC) thus, people nicknamed him “wa Iria” which means of milk.

4.13. Subtopic Thirteen

Mohamed Ali, widely known as Moha Jicho Pevu, is a Kenyan Politician and the Member of Parliament for Nyali Constituency in Mombasa County. He bagged the name from his popular investigative show that aired on one of Kenyan television networks. Years after quitting media and joining politics, he is still referred to as Jicho Pevu.

4.14. Subtopic Fourteen

Esther Muthoni Passaris is a Kenyan politician, and the incumbent Nairobi County woman representative in the bicameral Kenyan parliament. She was nicknamed Mama Taa when she was running an initiative dubbed “Adopt A Light” that sought to install street lights in the city’s slum areas.

4.15. Subtopic Fifteen

James Mathenge Ndung’u, popularly known as Kanini Kega, is a member of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) and formerly the member of parliament for Kieni Constituency, Nyeri County. He acquired his nickname Kanini Kega in 1998 When he first vied for the Democratic Party nominations which was the most popular party in the region. At that time he was 26 years old. Other leaders dismissed him as “a beardless man with nothing to offer on the political table” but the voters liked him. His name means “young but good” in translation from Kikuyu dialect.

5. Topic Five

The creativity of Kenyans in coining political nicknames showcases their engagement with political discourse and their ability to use humor to express their views. [18] posits that the onomastic meaning of a name is a cluster of several layers of meaning. They may be summarized as: the linguistic layer which is also called literal or denotative meaning; the cultural layer which, beyond the name givers’ motivations that it describes, can provide the socio-cultural and philosophical precepts of a linguistic community; lastly, the pragmatic layer, which indicates the meaning that a name takes on in the context of its use, be it an interpersonal, a situational or a social context. In our study this is best illustrated by Azimio la Umoja party leader Raila Odinga whose nicknames have been constantly shifting depending on political situations. From Agwambo, Baba, Tinga, Jakom to Nyundo. Agwambo is a Luo name meaning unpredictable or mystery. For example, Baba means father and he got the name from his supporters who see him as a father figure while Tinga means tractor and Odinga was given the name when he was the National Development Party (NDP) leader, the party whose slogan was Tinga. Therefore, nicknames are not arbitrary but signify varying social-political. Nick-

names can be fluid and adaptable. They can evolve over time, be shortened or lengthened, or even replaced altogether. This flexibility allows individuals to express different aspects of the politician's personality. President William Ruto for instance has been given numerous nicknames by Kenyans, reflecting his personality, leadership style, and political moves. Flying man was used to criticise him with some Kenyans playfully accusing him of "touring the globe" rather than prioritising domestic affairs, while reference to him as "Doyen" portrayed respect and admiration. According to [19] nicknames are often unstable; in a state of perpetual flux and in constant motion like language and culture that hold them. In this respect, political nicknames in Kenya are best understood in the dynamics of Kenyan political context which is quite fluid.

In Kenyan political context nicknames are embellish with connotative meaning. For instance, Uhuru Kenyatta was nicknamed Jayden which means pampered and lazy kids, who depend on the wealth of their parents. Kenyans largely believed that Uhuru's background had taken him out of touch with what ordinary citizens go through. While Mike Mbuvi's real name has almost been forgotten with many Kenyans referring to him as Mike Sonko or simply Sonko ("rich person" or "boss"). He earned the name Sonko thanks to his flamboyant lifestyle. [16] argues that the function of connotative meaning is to assert the hearer about the speaker's opinion. The speaker is going to show the hearer about her beliefs, ideas, and thoughts, in order to enhance the reader that her idea is true. Consequently, nickname comes to stand for how we see ourselves or how other see us depending on their source. Their connotative nature distinguish them proper names. This is because they "reflect how others see the name bearers within a group's circle" [13]. A case in point is when in 2010 Kalonzo Musyoka supported the draft constitution in the campaign but members of the campaign team opposing the constitution, led by William Ruto, claimed that he was secretly opposing the draft leading to a comparison of Kalonzo to a watermelon fruit which is naturally green on the outside and red inside During the swearing in of Raila Odinga as the people's President on 31st January, Kalonzo skipped taking the oath. This was another platform for Kenyan to address him as "watermelon".

It is worth mentioning that some nicknames are coined to shame the bearer. Inevitably, nickname bearers sometimes reject bestowed nicknames in a manner that strongly indicates their disapproval of the offered nickname. Hon. Martha Karua for example does not fancy the reference to her as the irony lady as she views it as part of gender stereotyping though it reflects her no-nonsense nature in the political world. The reference to Hon. Kalonzo Musyoka as "WaterMelon" which is naturally green on the outside and red inside signifies indecisiveness and the former Vice President does not fancy the name. This reaction can be attributed to the realisation on the part of the bearers that such nicknames are mostly used consciously by the speaker to offend the nickname bearer [9]. Nicknames can be used defame a person's reputation and even abuse this person emotionally [20]. Hon. Ali Hassan Joho was referred as Sultan by Nelson Marwa to hit out at him

over claims that he was acting like the region's sultan. Joho took issue with the name, arguing that it brought back memories of slave trade and was an attempt at tarnishing his name. He said that his political enemies wanted to derive an agenda by branding him as the Sultan so as scare people not to vote him as the governor, but instead, people endorsed the name, Sultan.

The main reason for nicknames' formation in the English language is the perception of the environment by a person both positively and negatively – socially-evaluated. Reflecting the general culture of English society and culture within the individual, in particular, nicknames create socio-cultural symbols, and cultural universals, indicating the traditions of people, habits, lifestyles, tastes, and ideas [15]. Additionally, Koma [20] postulates that the carrier of the nickname finds it better when the nickname is used for praise purposes. In Kenya many politicians have won elections due to popular postive nicknames. Hon. Paul Kimani Njoroge, popularly known as Kimani Wamatangi was elected as the third governor of Kiambu having served as the Senator for the same County for helping people for helping them get water tanks while Hon. Francis Mwangi popularly known as Wa Iria was elected the first Governor of Murang'a County due to reviving the new Kenya Cooperative Creameries (New KCC) thus, people nicknamed him "Iria" which means milk. Often the existence of nicknames is a sign of popularity either in politics or in sports. Consequently, nicknames may have different impact on politicians: be a powerful catalyst in their political career or vice versa - to break it down.

Furthermore, nicknames are usually one-of-a-kind and are specific to an individual. They can be a way to express personality, creativity, or a sense of humor, and can help to differentiate someone from others with similar names. Hon. Ferdinand Waititu's leadership style for example was anything but conventional—boisterous, aggressive, and unapologetically populist. He became a fixture in Nairobi's political circles, often seen engaging directly with constituents, sometimes even physically confronting issues himself earning him the name Baba Yao. After long use of "baba yao" nickname to gain political mileage, Waititu registered the name with the Registry of Documents in Nairobi hence becoming his official name. In another case, just weeks before the elections, James Mathenge Ndung'u, popularly known as Kanini Kega swore an affidavit to officially adopt the nicknames so that they could appear in the ballot papers. He argued that going to the election with his previous names might have robbed him many votes because there are supporters who only knew him by the nicknames. His argument are in tandem with [4] views that a nickname makes one stand out from others and, therefore, falls into the focus of attention. Using the name in an election may enhance chances of election.

Another important aspect of nicknames is their role in influencing the perceptions of users [21]. Because of the semantic value evident in some nicknames (e.g. Kanini Kega "young but good", Mama Taa "Woman who brings light" and hustler "working hard to make ends meet") such names have the consequence of rein-

forcing the character of certain relationships and social attitudes, reminding everyone of the attributes of the bearer and creating expectations which affect perceptions, and may particularly influence elections positively. On the other hand, “Jayden” was coined to ridicule Uhuru who hailed from a powerful political family. President Ruto’s nicknames such as uncle Willy, Nabii, Zakayo, Hustler, El Chapo among others often carry both positive and negative connotations, reflecting the diverse opinions of the Kenyan public. While some are embraced by Ruto, others serve as critiques of his policies and leadership style. Ruto’s nicknames illustrate his complex relationship with the public and the evolving nature of his political image.

Names are not just arbitrary symbols; they signify status, achievement, privilege, and meaningful social organization. They may communicate ethnicity, social status, and social prestige all understood as meaningful within social contexts. Nicknames, are often used as terms of endearment and can create a strong emotional connection between individuals. They can be a way to show love, friendship, or camaraderie, and can strengthen bonds between people [22]. Some illustrations in Kenya include; Hon. Musalia Mudavadi popularly referred as MaDVD which is a direct name that was derived from his name MuDaVaDi, Riggy G which was derived from Hon. Rigathi Gachagua’s real name as a way of making it melodious and RAO which is an acronym of Raila Amollo Odinga used by his supporters to fondly refer to him. However, there are pejorative names that condemn, mock and express contempt for certain politicians. They include reference to Raila as Kitendawili (contemptuous for his use of riddles), Referring to Ruto as Nabii (loosely translated as prophet but with contempt) or reference to Kalonzo Musyoka as Watermelon. These names reveal underlining negative-evaluated attitude of the users towards the object of contempt [4]. The pseudonyms serve as a reflection of the diverse opinions held by the citizens towards their leaders.

[23] argues that in function, nicknames vary between usage as 3rd person reference or vocative address. Some nicknames are used personally within a community, while others are used by the general public for famous referents. These nicknames are interesting as they are free from real-world standardization and depersonalized from users’ work and life backgrounds and carry other characteristics. For example, former president Uhuru Kenyatta was given sorts of names in line with what Kenyans thought of his character, from Wanjohi, a Kikuyu name meaning “a man who loves alcohol” to “wamashati”, a locally coined name to mean man of shirts due to his selection of designer. Hon. Moses Wetangula on the other hand, is popularly known as Papa wa Roma owing to his cult-like following in Bungoma County who follow his directives the same way Catholic faithful follow the directive of the Pope. Almost every prominent politicians has earned a nickname in Kenya. [24] affirm that by virtue of their nature, nicknames contain important social meaning that reflects the nicknamers’ beliefs and attitudes towards nickname holders which seems the case in Kenya.

Finally, nicknames that have been discussed in this study reflect how Kenyans

see their political leaders and provide clues about their sentiments at different situations. These nicknames often carry both positive and negative connotations, reflecting the diverse opinions of the Kenyan public. While some are embraced by some politicians, others serve as critiques of their policies and leadership style. These nicknames, can be fluid and adaptable depending on various socio-political situations. They are often unstable hence best understood in the dynamics of its context but their role in influencing the perceptions of users; even if (sometimes) inaccurately is in no dispute [25]. “Kasongo Yeye” for instance, has evolved from a viral trend into a satirical critique of President Ruto, with its origins in music, humor, and political discourse continuing to captivate Kenyans online and in opposition political rallies.

6. Topic Six

In conclusion, it is evident that nicknames given to Kenyan politicians express affection, stigmas, ironies and experiences. The mention of names like baba yao, Zakayo, Hustler, Jayden, Jicho Pevu, Iron lady or even Watermelon brings certain images in the minds of Kenyans. The nicknames of various politicians in Kenya vary greatly from one another and are used to identify the politicians’ characteristics focusing on their speech, behaviours, leadership traits, political choices and personal habits. Indeed, this study reveals that nicknames are significant to both bearers and users, and sometimes politicians use them to endear themselves to voters while the electorates quite often use them to deride and characterize political leaders. Some nicknames are used to commend and build careers while others ridicule unwanted characters, and expose certain characters of an unwanted nature. This unique invention can be positive for purposes of negotiating social safety, but it can equally have distasteful repercussion for individuals who are given certain unwanted nicknames.

Whichever way, Kenyans are a creative lot especially when it comes to baptizing politicians with nicknames as political identifiers, signaling metaphorically how they view them in different situations. Through nicknames political messages are sent, intents are expressed and power dynamics are expressed. Some of the names are endearing to the politicians while other are negative evaluations that express dislike or disapproval of their actions and behaviour. The names easily spread since political leaders are at the center of the media receiving public scrutiny and assessments of their activities.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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