Football and a New National Identity: An Audience Survey of Rwandan Professionals
Abstract

Literature connects sports with creating a feeling of unity and nation building amongst people. In a country such as Rwanda, a nation that is rebuilding itself after ethnic tensions that resulted into genocide against one of the ethnic groups, the Tutsi, it is important to understand the role of the new national identity in the process of rebuilding the country. Subsequently, this study aimed at investigating the link between national identity and sport specifically how professionals in Rwanda, as football fans, perceive their national identity. To this end, the study used survey questionnaire to investigate perceptions of new national identity. The findings relate football to the new national identity based on unity and professionals identify themselves with that new national identity. These findings suggest that football plays an important role in building the national identity for a country. This study presents original findings about new Rwandan national identity and its representation and, thus, fills a gap in existing literature. It also serves as a basis to study further the Rwandan national identity.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

This dissertation focused on football and a new national identity using an audience study of Rwandan professionals. Sport is significantly followed and sports news is given enough time in Rwanda. In particular, football is, arguably, the most popular sport discipline in Rwanda. Consequently, football can be portrayed as a cornerstone in the unification process of Rwandans after ethnic tensions that culminated in genocide against Tutsi in 1994.

Following the unrest in Rwanda in 1994, as detailed in chapter 4, the nation was left divided. Much literature has connected sports with creating a feeling of unity and nation building amongst a people. Mills (2013: 945) stated that, as united, the Serbs’ feeling of belonging to their nation, Yugoslavia, was strengthened by football as symbolically covered in media. In a similar vein, Keech (2004: 106) pointed out the role of sport that served as a channel for nation building where its representation played a role in building a united new South Africa. In Rwanda, one of the most interesting national football tournaments is ‘Peace Cup’ which originates from the government bid to rebuild the country’s social cohesion after the tragic moments of 1994 genocide committed against Tutsis.

As such, the topic of this dissertation is of academic interest because it looks into to what extent Rwanda has now passed this crisis that divided its population, and I hope the study can gauge to what extent professionals in the country feel Rwandan, rather than identifying themselves as Hutu or Tutsi.

This dissertation is structured as follows:
Following this introduction chapter is the Literature Review in chapter 2, which aims to identify gaps in the existing literature. These led to the research question of this thesis. The chapter starts by viewing arguments about the national identity and what it entails and then moves on to investigate views about how the concept is defined as ‘imagined communities’. Next, research on sport and national identity is surveyed by looking into the studies conducted on the national identity and its depiction through sports. Finally, particular academic accounts about football and national identity are reviewed. The research questions of this study are stated.

Chapter 3 is the Methodology chapter. It describes how this study went about finding answers to the sub-research questions leading to answering the main research question. This chapter explains the method of investigation that this study draws on, which was the use of a questionnaire. It provides the reasons for choosing this method for the study. Following the designing stage of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was piloted and then used for data collection. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main direction of the dissertations’ method.

The following chapter, chapter 4, is a factual chapter. It briefly gives some facts about Rwanda and its historical background, which goes a way to explaining why this study is important and timely.

Chapter 5, then, starts by presenting the findings of the questionnaire. It shows the respondents personal characteristics. Their views are presented along with their discussion and implications. Then it presents the analysis of those findings. The analysis considers the existing literature and points out where it agrees or disagrees with this study’s findings.
Finally, the conclusion chapter (Chapter 6) summarizes the main findings, tying these to the sub-research questions. The theoretical implications of this study are then discussed, as well as the study’s limitations and how future research can build on this study, making suggestions for future work.

**Chapter 2. Literature Review**

**2.1. Introduction**

This thesis aims to examine the link between sports, i.e. the Rwandan national football team, and how people feel as Rwandan. Therefore, this literature review starts at section 2.2 with surveying views about national identity and its representation as imagined communities. Section 2.3 focuses on the sports and national identity, particularly on the expression of national identity in sports. Following this, section 2.4 explores the studies that have looked at football and national identity representation. Finally, section 2.5 draws conclusions about the gaps in the current literature and outlines the national identity perception of Rwandan professionals through football.

**2.2. National Identity**

**2.2.1. Definition of Terms**

As it appears the term national identity combines both words ‘nation’ and ‘identity’. It is; therefore, better to understand these words in order to be able to make good sense of the entire term ‘national identity’.
2.2.2. Nation

The word ‘nation’ has been in the center of interests and widely debated by many scientists in social theory (Smith 1991; Guibernau 2004; Miscevic 2014). Smith (1991: 14) suggested that a nation should be understood as the existence of these common assumptions; shared historic territory; shared culture and historical myths; as well as common rights and economy among members of the community. Consequently, from the author’s understanding, the idea of a nation has emerged from the existence of a community and the combination of these features is what constitutes the concept of a nation. In contrast to this understanding of a ‘nation’, Guibernau (2004: 125) conducted a critical study on Smith’s definition. This study analyzed the attributes to a nation as stated by Smith such as the sharing of legal rights and duties of a given community members. The author found that the ethnosymbolist approach developed by Smith detaches cultural from the political aspects of nations and national identity. Thus, the approach does not give a complete contemporary meaning of the nations and national identity. The author argues that the political consequences should not be overlooked in the constitution of a nation (2004: 141).

Furthermore, the idea of a nation cannot be dissociated from the nationalism. The latter has been defined differently by scholars. When a given population cares about a nation which is manifested in their attitudes towards that nation and, at the same time, actions that characterize people to bring about the sovereignty of their nation, in this case, nationalism can be referred to Miscevic (2014). It would not surprise if this same situation applies to a sport where fans, for instance, in a national football game support their national team. The fact of caring about their national team calls upon the spirit, otherwise referred to as
attitudes, of togetherness as fans who share the same nation and whose actions culminate in supporting their team.

2.2.3. Identity

Nation and identity can be understood as two separate words but still, both of these words entail a sense of belonging. Hall et al. (1995: 597-598) viewed identity as a process in which the identity does not have a status that is static or that stays unconditionally essential or permanent. For them, the identity of a post-modern subject that stays open created and continuously reshaped as related to the way people are described through their cultural belonging. Therefore, they define a nation as an emblematic society in which people share the sense of their identity and feel engaged to generate it. This aspect of identity is what is meant by a sense of belonging (1995: 609).

In a similar vein, Guibernau (2004: 138) describes the concept of identity from a relationship perspective to modernity and that has an influence on the political dimension of national identity. There have been many cases where the contemporary situation has influenced politics of a nation. Rwanda as a post-conflict country is trying to reconstruct its social fabrics through the creation of new national identity due to tragic experience it went through, for instance.

2.2.4. National Identity as an Imagined Community

Hobsbawm (1983: 1) created the term 'invented tradition' via which national identity should be understood as practices and rules of a represented nature with the aim to highlight certain values and norms and have a sense of continuity from the past. Echoing these views, Anderson (1983: 49) stated that national identity is imagined since it does not
require members of a given community or country to know each other because of the communion that characterizes them as people from the same area who share the same traditions, values etc. This sense of communion is imaginary though they did not have to interact among themselves. The sense of imaginary communion and the spirit of belonging to a given community often result in judging others (Anderson, 1983: 49). Following this line of thoughts, Triandafyllidou (1998: 598) took her study further when she explored national identity as a feeling of belonging but most importantly the role of others on national identity in what she referred to as ‘significant others’. She analyzed the influence that others can have on the creation or conduct to the transformation of the identity of a given group. Her study revealed that national identity can be understood as a self-awareness of group of people sharing the same characteristics, such as originating from the same nation, and the way the nationhood may undergo some external influences from and in contrast to others. Expanding upon this, Wood (2014: 99) conducted a study with the aim to shed light on the relationship between national identity and prestige. His study analyzed prestige as the highest level of self-recognition and as an element that keeps on characterizing human affairs. The author realized that prestige varies according to eras. For the author, sporting prowess and some other factors may portray national prestige where the nation names are considered as prestigious brands (2014: 111).

What we have learned here, as regarding the direction of this study, is that national identity is very much something that exists in the minds of citizens. In other words, it is an experience which a group of people might share, rather than it being a physical thing. This suggests that it is important to ask respondents about how they experience national symbols.
such as the national Rwandan football team, and what Rwandan national identity, if they feel or experience what this, entails for them.

2.3. Sport and National Identity

Early beginning of the twentieth century many of the strong Western nations had put much emphasis on sport’s popularity so as to forge sports traditions with the aim to manifest their nations’ existence (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1983: 11). Over the same period, sport was associated with national cultures to confirm and construct their national identities (1983:11).

A further dimension of this point was developed by arguments that emphasized the role of sport in the creation and depiction of the national identity. Mehus and Kolstad (2011: 833) conducted a study on the sustainability of the identity and how its creation is related to the sport in general and local national football teams in particular. Their study analyzed the way male fans express their strong fanatic stand vis-a-vis their favorite team more than female fans do. The author found out that there are different fanatic effects on male and female fans where male strongly associate themselves with the national team instead of the local team which is the opposite for female who prefer to identify themselves with local teams. The author went on to show that strong support of the national team is closely related to positive attitudes towards the nation (2011: 843).

Finally, Maguire (2011: 978) investigated the role of the sport in building and portraying British/English national identity and how cultural identities are affected by globalization in general nowadays. The author analyzed the Anglo-Australian relations with regard to cricket to emphasize the questions found. His findings confirmed that political level being
ruined by the role of sport as far as regional integration is concerned. However, he stated that sport boosted and represented reduced contrasts between the nations (2011: 991).

The literature covered in this section sheds light on the role of sport in the creation of national identity. The idea of investigating into national identity and nationalism, depicted through sport, is of a paramount importance since this study aims at looking into what respondents as sports supporters identify themselves with.

2.4. Football and National Identity Representation

Football is, arguably, one of the most popular sport disciplines in many corners of the world and has been serving to represent not only the national identity but also nation rebuilding in some of the post war countries. Armstrong (2002: 471) conducted a study on football and reconstruction of Liberia. In his study, he analyzed the role that football can play in both the construction of national identity and the rebuilding the nation as a post war society. The author found that football cannot unify all conflicting sides; however, it can temporarily serve as a control of ethnopolitical tensions (2002: 490).

On the other hand, Nyambi (2016: 1) in his study explores the complex meanings attributed to the names of the Zimbabwean national football team. The author analyzed the political influence associated with the name of the national team ‘Warrior’ to build a national identity. He found that the name of the national team was politically used to represent the nation (20016: 15).

The role of football in relation to the national identity was also researched by Rojo-Labaïen (2017: 63) who conducted a study about the historical importance of the football as a complex patriotic vector in the recent Basque Country. The study draws on the division in
the sports field between Spanish Basque and the French Basque Country, where Rugby became the unifying icon. The author found out that the composition of the national teams is mainly viewed as the representation of the nations’ understanding of the citizenry (2017: 76).

The literature covered in this section suggests that football fandom ought to, indeed, prove to be a good place to investigate the extent to which the respondents of this study feel Rwandan, or lack such a feeling of particular national identity. In addition, no existing research was found on national identity and Rwanda.

2.5. Conclusion

This section aimed to draw conclusions about the gaps in the current literature and outline this thesis’ research question. This literature is necessarily selective and condensed account of literature on topics that are related to, and important for, the topics of this study. But it aims to place this study in its context and see where it can further knowledge.

Based on the above sources, and the gaps identified in the literature, this study formulated the following research question: “How do professionals in Rwanda, as football fans, perceive their national identity as they are questioned about football?”

In order to answer this research question, it was broken down into two sub-research questions:

1. Do professionals identify with ‘being Rwandan’ or not?
2. Does football make professionals feel their national identity stronger?

The following chapter considers the method chosen for this study, and how it was applied.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter explains the method employed to conduct the study. The chapter starts by restating the research and sub-research questions in section 3.2. It then examines one method of investigation on which this study drew in section 3.3. Sections 3.4 and 3.5 describe the research procedure and explore the piloting exercise that preceded the actual analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main direction of the dissertation methods in section 3.6.

3.2. Research and sub-research questions

This study on the Rwandan national identity had one main research question ‘how do professionals in Rwanda, as football fans, perceive their national identity as they are questioned about football?’ The initial literature review gave rise to non-directional and open-ended sub-research questions.

As such, in line with the study’s aims to contribute to the literature, the thesis studies the link between today’s Rwandan national identity and the way it is felt via football in Rwanda. The research question in this study targeted the question whether and how professionals in Rwanda, as football fans, perceive their national identity as they are questioned about football. In order to answer the main research question, this study has two sub-research questions targeting to know if professionals identify themselves with ‘being Rwandan’ or not and if football makes professionals feel their national identity stronger. Those sub-research questions are:
1) Do professionals identify with ‘being Rwandan’ or not?

2) Does football make professionals feel their national identity stronger?

3.3. Questionnaire

This study used a questionnaire to collect data. Rwandan respondents were sent questionnaires to give their opinions about the perception of their national identity. Oates (2006: 219) defined a questionnaire as a set of questions organized in sequential order through which the informants are invited to give answers to the questions. In this respect, the questionnaire helped the researcher to gain information that was analyzed and interpreted in chapter 5. The questions mainly focused on the national identity and how is experienced by Rwanda football fans. In addition to this idea, Brace (2013:4) emphasized that the important role of a questionnaire lies in its flexibility to be self-administered once it is sent to the respondents for completion. This situation corresponded to my research situation since respondents had time to fill in the questionnaires that were sent to them before submission.

A survey questionnaire was designed to determine and understand the perceptions of the Rwandan professionals about their national identity. Thus, it was used to collect the data through different kinds of questions. According to Oates (2006: 222), questions can be described as being ‘closed questions’ and ‘open questions’. The author suggests that open questions provide the respondent with the room to think and answer the questions. In this case, respondents were given space on each of the open questions so that they could fill in fill in their answers. With closed questions, however, respondents were compelled to answer the questions by making choice from a pre-defined list of questions. Following the nature of these questions, the formats of the questions as well the answers manifested
certain characteristics. In addition to the open questions and closed questions such as yes/no, likert-scale questions were also resorted to. The motive behind asking these kinds of questions stemmed from the desire to capture the attitudes of the respondents vis-à-vis the perception of their national identity when questioned about football. Oppenheim (1992: 92) defines ‘likert-scale’ question as a question in a form of statement to which respondents have to choose by ticking the box that matches with their views most closely following the degree of agreement or disagreement.

Given the fact that the present study is qualitative in nature, many questions stayed open since the study seeks to collect the opinions from the Rwandan respondents about their feelings with Rwandan national identity. The views collected from the respondents using questionnaires were qualitatively analyzed and interpreted.

3.3.1. Advantages and disadvantages of the questionnaire

The questionnaire method used for data collection in this research presented advantages and disadvantages. Mitchell and Jolley (2010: 263) view advantages of questionnaires from two main perspectives. These include the easy distribution to reach many respondents, but most importantly the questionnaire’s ability to keep the respondents anonymous allows honest answers to specific and personal questions (2010: 263). Among the questions that respondents had to answer the expression of their opinions about national identity via football and attitudes was mandatory and they were guaranteed anonymity. Addition to this point, questionnaires can be used to surpass the geographical barriers since they can easily be sent out to the specific respondents through emails (Oates, 2006: 230).

On the other hand, questionnaires have disadvantages. These disadvantages are mainly explained as limitations that the use of questionnaire cannot satisfy when collecting data
from the respondents. Oppenheim (1992: 102) stated the lack of occasion to probe for more
details or rectify any misunderstandings between the researcher and respondent as a
challenge. The author believes that there should be room to provide further explanations or
offer help for the respondent to answer accurately. In addition to this, Oates (2006: 230)
mentioned that lack of control over the administered questionnaires for responses; it is
difficult to verify the truthfulness of the answers from the respondents. In this case, the
researcher may not be able to examine the discrepancies between answers obtained from
the data collection. Keeping in mind all of these realities that describe the use of the
questionnaire in this research, questions were asked with careful attention to avoid any
misunderstanding that might have impeded a successful data collection process from the
respondents.

3.3.2. The appropriateness of the questionnaire to this study

The questionnaire was deemed suitable for this study as a useful method for data collection
due to a number of factors such as time and financial constraints but, predominantly,
geographic situation that separates both the researcher and the respondents. The researcher
is a Rwandan national currently studying in Sweden while the respondents are Rwandan
professionals living in Rwanda. In order to cope with this geographic and challenging
situation, Oates (2006:228) suggested that the internet provides a potential means of
sending the questionnaires to the respondents wherever they are. Respondents can receive
them either via emails or by designing a questionnaire as a web form. To this end, to collect
data the questionnaire designed in Google forms was sent to potential respondents using
their emails addresses.
The choice of resorting to the use of Google forms to design a questionnaire was also motivated by its engaging features that draw respondents’ attention and ease the filling the process. In addition, from the Google forms’ backend, the researcher accesses the respondents’ feedback in a detailed and manageable dataset for analysis.

3.4. Description of the research procedure

3.4.1. The Sample

This research intended to collect opinions in an audience survey from Rwandan respondents about their opinions with regards to their national identity. The targeted respondents are educated professionals aged 25 and above who share the characteristic of being fans of football. Initially, the targeted sample was 15 respondents however 13 respondents participated during the data collection process. Table 1 provides details of the sample characteristics.

**Personal characteristics of respondents: Age and education**

The age category and education level of respondents are summarized in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above 38 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 38 years</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal characteristics of respondents: Profession

The informants had a variety of professions in a varying number. There were three teachers, two civil engineers, two businessmen, one public officer, an IT technician, a scientist, a sports analyst, a sports reporter and one communication and public relations officer.

3.4.2. Stages of the research

The selection process of the respondents for this study relied on the purposive and snowball sampling methods. In the first place, 8 respondents the researcher purposely identified as they were potential informants to provide valuable data which align with the aim of the study being conducted (Oates, 2006: 98). In the second place, aspiring to reach the targeted sample size, the researcher used the snowball technique by requesting the initial respondents for more contacts and got in contact with them. Oates (2006: 98) viewed the snowball sampling technique as a suggestion made by the initial respondent who would precisely designate other respondents with whom he/she shares the same characteristics. In this respect, some informants pointed out other respondents, Rwandan professionals and football fans, who were also contacted so as to fill out the questionnaire.

3.5 Pilot

The pilot phase was of paramount importance since the process provided the researcher with a clear picture of the questionnaire administration beforehand. Firstly, the questionnaire was introduced to the survey participants. It was made clear that data collected will be used anonymously for the study and that their contacts will not be used other than for reminders.
The questionnaire was tested with two people. It allowed the researcher to revise the questions and present them in a more understandable and easier for the informants. In a similar vein with what has been done, whether the researcher is sure or not of what might come out as results, it is important to conduct a pilot survey to increase clarity and coherence of the questionnaire and avoid ambiguity and any form of bias.

3.5.1. Steps taken to pilot of the questionnaire

Oppenheim (1992: 47) stated that a designed questionnaire needs a test. It has to go through a number of steps so as to ensure it will reach the aim of the study. The refinement of the questionnaire started with the formulation of the questions and instructions that align with the study aim which focuses on how Rwandan professionals identify their national identity in the light of football. It should be reminded that the questionnaire was designed with help of Google forms for the reasons explained earlier (section 3.3.2). With the following step, two questionnaires were sent out to two respondents for a test. Their answers to the questions and the comments on the questionnaire presentation were then analyzed.

The questionnaire was revised following the feedback from the test to fit the study purpose. The revised questionnaire was sent to 15 potential informants and 13 of them responded.

3.5.2. Findings that emerged from the pilot

The piloting exercise revealed issues related to the question order and an unclear wording in some of the instruction sentences. The question order, revisited twice, was particularly regarding the section with questions that had to do with respondents’ attitudes. The section was re-ordered to avoid further confusion. Respondents gave a positive feedback about the
easy and practical use of the online questionnaire. They testified that responding and submitting to the online questionnaire was straightforward. The reason behind this was that the online questionnaire saved their time and resources since they did not have to download it, fill it and later on upload it so as to send it back to the researcher. By piloting the questionnaire, the instructions and questions were assessed and revised. When those testing ceased to suggest substantial changes this marked the end of the pilot phase. Filling the questionnaire took 15 minutes on average.

3.6 Conclusion

This study drew on questionnaires as a method. The techniques of the questionnaire were based on the work by Oates (2006) and Oppenheim (1992). The main aim of the questionnaire was to collect the data for this study from respondents that were, geographically, far from the researcher.

The answers that were provided to some of the questions attempted to answer both of the sub-research questions. Some words from their answers, for instances, were associated with the way respondents identify themselves as Rwandan.

The research has attempted to be self-reflexive by making clear the process of the research, and by including significant details and reasons of key decisions. The questionnaire has been diligently piloted. The appropriateness of the method for this study has been discussed and attention was drawn to their respective strengths and weaknesses.

The next chapter looks at the turbulent history of Rwanda and aims to contextualize this study and the search for a ‘new’ national identity, as mentioned in the thesis title. It also underscores the importance of this study, in so far that it describes a country divided by ethnic strife.
Chapter 4: Factual Chapter

This chapter provides some facts about Rwanda, the country where the case study for the research was taken from. Rwanda is a developing country located in central East Africa bordering with Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Uganda. Rwanda has three official languages Kinyarwanda, English, and French. It has an area of 26338 km².

The National commission for the Fight against Genocide (CNLG, 2017) acknowledges that there has been the classification of the Rwandans in the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic lines. The tragic moments that Rwanda experienced in 1994 were related to this classification as the genocide was perpetrated against one of those lines, Tutsi, culminating in the total destruction of the Rwandan social fabrics. The genocide was stopped by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) overthrowing the then regime. After that tragedy, the necessity of rebuilding and healing the wounds of its people was prioritized. One of the mechanisms put in place towards rebuilding and healing was the establishment of the National Commission for Unity and Reconciliation (NCUR). Since then, the Rwandan government’s rejection of ethnic belonging has been a priority in reconstructing a new national identity for all Rwandans (Plancke, 2016).
Chapter 5: Results and Analysis

5.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the results and the analysis of the data collected through the use of questionnaire sent to the respondents online. It starts in section 5.2 by attempting to provide an answer to the first sub-research question. Section 5.3 aims to formulate an answer as regards the second sub-research question. The chapter concludes in section 5.4.

5.2. Professionals and a new Rwandan national identity

All the thirteen and professional respondents confirmed that they support the national football team and that to support the team makes them feel Rwandan. This shows they totally identify with being Rwandan.

Wood (2014: 111) suggests that sporting prowess and some other factors may portray national prestige. This is related to what the respondents expressed as they were dominantly proud of the Rwandan national football team. The two exceptions were one who was neutral and another who was not proud. The reasons behind that pride varied from the pride to be Rwandan making one to be proud of the team representing the country, the victory of the team being the victory of the country and its people and all the players are nationals and they do their best to win. This reality was echoed by Rojo-Labaïen (2017: 76) as he found out that the composition of the national teams is mainly viewed as the representation of the nations’ understanding of the citizenry. The fact the national team is entirely composed of Rwandan nationals, according to the respondents, was mainly mentioned as the foundation for the Rwandan representation. Furthermore, this shared understanding of the national team’s representation was scholarly explained by Anderson
(1983) as an imagined national identity for it does not require members of a given community or country to know each other and share the same communion that characterizes them as people from the same area who share the same traditions, values etc.

Three respondents who somewhat agreed expressed concerns related to the selection of players, the team management and not winning trophies. The respondent, who was neutral about the pride in the team, gave the poor performance of the team as a reason while the one who did not feel proud was due to the team's lack of promising programs for improvement. One of the respondents, respondent 1 said:

*I am proud of the Rwandan national football team because it represents my country. They do their best to win and their victory is for all Rwandans. Similarly, when they lose it is us, Rwandans, who loose as a country.*

Those who were neutral and negative following their explanations they are rather concerned for the good of the national team. This means that if the issues pointed out were taken into consideration and corrected they may be siding with those who are proud.

Mostly the respondents expressed that they feel represented by the national team because they are Rwandans; one stated that the national team represents all Rwandans and thus feels represented by the team. Respondents 3 said:

*I feel that the Rwandan national football team represents me because it is national team of my country.*

Similarly, most respondents answered that the team represents the nation with the exception of one of them who somewhat disagrees. The reasons from those who say that the team represents the nation vary from on to the other. They range from the selection that is done from the entire country without any discrimination but based on the player's
performance, a national team composed of only Rwandans, and that where the team plays they raise the national flag and sing the national anthem. Respondent 5 expressed:

*We choose the best players around the whole country and where they go to play the national anthem is sang and the national flag is there.*

These findings agree with Rojo-Labaïen (2017: 76) about the composition of the national team viewed as the representation of the nations’ understanding of the citizenry. Also, raising the flag and singing the national anthem where the national team plays mentioned by the respondents invoke the factors suggested by Wood (2014: 111) as showing national prestige.

One respondent differing from the rest expressed that the selection takes those who are good but those left behind are not as good. Respondent 13 says that the team represents those who play well because those who do not are not selected for the team. He said:

*The team is made of the best elite footballers from the country that are sent as delegates to represent the rest who stay off pitch supporting as fans.*

This opinion may relate to a critique which is more of a concern about the national representation that suggests giving chance to lower performers to be in the national team which will allow them to improve. This response shows that the respondent cares about improving the players’ performance in general which brings the element of nationalism as explained by Miscevic (2014).

Being Rwandan was found to have a variety of meanings as per the respondents. They link being Rwandan to being hard working, being confident, have Rwandan cultural values, develop home grown solutions, support each other, perseverance towards the targets, patriotism and prioritizing national interest. Respondent 12 said:
In this modern Rwanda, we have a common culture despite the diversity among Rwandans both born here and those who returned from the diaspora.

This feedback from the respondents may suggest that Rwandans aspire to understand their problems on the move of developing their country. This brings the idea of nationalism related to doing what brings sovereignty (Miscevic, 2014). Given that these respondents were surveyed independently but their responses converge into unity and patriotism feelings, they also reflect the national identity as imagined defined by Anderson (1983: 49). The Rwandan national identity also links with the self-awareness of a group of those having common characteristics and how they go about influences (Triandafyllidou 1998: 598).

5.3. National identity among professionals from a football perspective

Football is identified as representing many things in relation to the national spirit in Rwanda. When asked what football represents about the national spirit of Rwanda, most of the respondents’ reactions included unity. Other elements that were mentioned in addition of the unity are patriotism and togetherness. Football is also said to bring together different regions in supporting the national team leading to unity and reconciliation. One of the responds, Respondent 1 attested that:

The football being the most followed game in Rwanda brings together many people. When different teams, other than the national team, play fans are happy to see their respective teams they support win. But when it comes to the national team Rwandans are all behind the team together. They support and encourage players, whoever they are, to win. This shows the togetherness and unity as far as the national spirit is concerned.
These opinions show that professionals in Rwanda link football to national spirit and unity. The frequency (10) of the word ‘unity’ from 13 reactions from the respondents point out that Rwandans are aware of the need for the unification in the Rwandan society. Given the ethnic divisionism that characterized Rwanda in the past, these views may indicate the results of the efforts of the government encouraging a new national identity which goes beyond ethnic divisions. This is also in line with the agenda of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission established in 1999. In addition, these findings on the national spirit and unity in Rwanda are in agreement with the research by Keech (2004: 106) who suggests that sport serves as a channel for nation building.

Figure 1. Attitudes representation

The characteristics of the respondents such as age are mainly in the same category, for the profession and education, they vary randomly. The answers to the likert scale for each of the questions fall mainly in one of the categories, however, the related explanations vary.
Figure 1 depicts the reactions of the informants to questions and statements. In general, the respondents support the national football team which makes them feel Rwandan. In addition, the informants feel that the national team represent the country. However, views differed a bit on pride in the national team and the representation of nationals. For the pride in the national team, the one who was not proud gave the team’s poor performance and lack of good plans for the future as reasons. But the same respondent supports the team and that makes him feel Rwandan. Therefore the explanations given could as well be considered as an expression of concerns about the team since he also supports the national team, making him feel Rwandan. The same respondent is the one who somewhat disagrees about the team representing him as an individual Rwandan. The explanation to this is that the good performers represent a country in the national team yet the country also has lower performers who need to be supported to advance. This raises a rather interesting element of wondering how the national teams are made of the best players only. However, this is the selection practice all over the world be it in football, other sports or elsewhere. The same respondent feels that the national team represents the entire nation which would again raise a question on how he does not feel represented.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to answer the study’s two sub-research questions. It has described and analysed respondents’ answers to the questionnaire and reflected what extent this study relates to the former studies in this field of research. The finding may suggest that football can play an important role in building the new national identity for a country that had been characterized by ethnic divisionism.
The next and final chapter summarises the overall findings of this study, points out the limitations and makes suggestions for future research.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This chapter starts in section 6.2 by recalling the research questions this thesis worked with. Section 6.3 summarizes the findings. Then section 6.4 elaborates on the thesis’ conceptual frameworks and shows the study limitations. Finally, section 6.5 explains how this dissertation contributes to future research.

6.2. Restatement of the research questions

This study set off to investigate how professionals in Rwanda, as football fans, perceive their national identity. To achieve that objective, two practical sub-questions were used 1) do professionals identify with ‘being Rwandan’ or not? And 2) Does football make professionals feel their national identity stronger?

These questions were answered by exploring the views of 13 Rwandan professionals who answered an online survey questionnaire, and by examining their feelings about Rwandan national identity.

6.3. Findings relevant to professionals and national identity

The findings have shown that professionals in Rwanda identify themselves with the new national identity as demonstrated by the unity they all expressed as characterizing the new Rwanda. This study found the national prestige as characterizing professionals in Rwanda through their pride in Rwanda national football team. The study also found that the composition of the team represents the understanding of citizenry by the nation. The idea of nationalism and sovereignty was expressed through the aspirations to improve the team’s
performance for an effective national representation. This study also sensed national identity as imagined and shared since the attitudes from different informants converged into unity and patriotism feelings.

6.4. Findings relevant to National identity among professionals from football perspective

Football being the most popular sport liked and followed by Rwandans in general, was found to be relevant in investigating the new national among professionals. Their views on national spirit, regardless of the age, profession and level of education, relate football to the new national identity based on unity. Therefore, football can serve as a ready means to build the new national identity.

6.5. Elaboration of the dissertation’s conceptual framework and its limitations

This section reviews the conceptual nature of the study and its limitations. This research used an online survey questionnaire, because it was found to be the most suitable method of reaching to respondents in Rwanda, and due to the methodological reasons outlined in section 3.3.2 of chapter 3. Though our target was to get 15 respondents, we ended up with 13. Arguably, this is a limited sample in view of the total population of the country to generalize the findings. Reaching out to potential respondents who were physically located in Rwanda was not easy. However, those who responded provided useful feedback that the research used to provide a first case study that investigates the hitherto unexplored issue, the new national identity and football in Rwanda. More respondents could be included if the researcher had more time or was on location in Rwanda. However, in view of the scope
of the current study, it has aimed to provide a snapshot view of how sentiments of national identity may be experienced in Rwanda. The underlying reasons for the presented view would be investigated in further research.

6.5. Conclusion

This study set out to analyze how professionals, as football fans, perceive the new national identity in Rwanda. To achieve its aim this study used an online survey conducted to assess attitudes about national identity.

The findings of this study form a starting point in analyzing further the contributions of football in unifying the Rwandans. From this current study, it was noticed that the new Rwandan national identity is a perception that exists in the minds of Rwandans. In other words, it is an experience which that Rwandans might share, instead of being a physical thing.

This research has built on and tested existing knowledge about the sport and national identity. It has presented original findings about new Rwandan national identity and its representation through which it fills a gap in existing literature. By doing this, the research has contributed to thinking about the representation of a new Rwandan national identity.

The conclusions that were reached can serve as a basis to, tentatively and carefully, say something about Rwandan national identity and its representation.

Thus, the dissertation looked at the new Rwandan identity but only focused on how it is felt via football. Further studies could build on this dissertation and investigate the reasons underlying the view of the national identity presented here. One of the ways to do this would be to use interviews as a method. Future studies could also assess the way the
national identity concept is portrayed through other sport disciplines such as basketball and volleyball. They could also use a different sample taking into account other characteristics such as gender, rural and urban areas.
7. References


