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FKVK02 Spring 2021 Supervisor: Maria Småberg

Reconciliation through football

A study on the role of football in the reconciliation process of Rwanda.

Abstract

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, during which Hutu and others who opposed the genocide were also killed, tore up the social fabric of Rwanda. The reconciliation effort has been immense involving actors from all walks of life all working with different methods and techniques.

This study turns to the beautiful game, football, and aims to examine what role the sport has played in the post-genocide reconciliation process in Rwanda. It does so in the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) context, as well as in the reconciliation research context. The study has been theoretically informed by John Paul Lederach and his study of the concept of *reconciliation* as well as Kristine Höglund and Ralph Sundberg and their conceptualization of sport within reconciliation processes. The study uses the method of qualitative content analysis.

The study found that a social space has been created around the game of football, both on national, community, and individual levels. It has been created both explicitly and inexplicitly.

Keywords: reconciliation, Rwanda, football

Word count: 10772

Abbreviations

AEBR - Association of Baptist Churches in Rwanda

AI – Amnesty International

AKWOS - Organization of Women in Sport

FHPU – Football for Hope, Peace, and Unity

HRW – Human Rights Watch

ICTR – International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

MDG – Millennium Development Goals

MINISPOC – Ministry of Sports and Culture

MINISPORT – Ministry of Sports

NURC – National Unity and Reconciliation Commission

RDRC – Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission

RPF – Rwanda Patriotic Front

SGD – Sustainable Development Goals

SPD – Sport for Development and Peace

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1 Introduction

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, during which Hutu and others who opposed the genocide were also killed took the life of up to 1 million people in a country with a population of around 7 million at the time (Donà, 2019:11). The task of reconciliation was and is immense.

Since the 27 years that have passed, Rwanda has gone through a transformation in more than one way. Its economic growth has been pointing upwards (World Bank, 2021) and the people have seemingly united under the new national identity of *Rwandan*. With the genocide having ethnicity and perceived ethnic differences as its modus operandi the government has since then worked to erase the old ethnicities and uniting the people.

The reconciliation effort has involved criminal proceedings, community courts, demobilization and reintegration, and remembrance. Stakeholders from the international community have been involved, as have national elite actors and grassroots. Reconciliation work can take many forms and sport has been brought forward as a way of working with it (Collison *et al.*, 2018). Among the different sports in the world football enjoys a special place due to its popularity around the globe (Shvili, 2020). This study then turns to football with the question of what role it might have in the reconciliation process.

1.1 Purpose and research question

The overarching purpose of this study is to examine how football has been used in the reconciliation effort in Rwanda. The focus is on both top-down government initiatives and bottom-up grassroots initiatives as well as middle actors. The study is based on John Paul Lederach's (1996; 1997) definition of reconciliation. Lederach's definition of different actors within peacebuilding at large and reconciliation more specifically also plays an important role in this study. I also draw from work concerning sport and reconciliation by Kristine Höglund and Ralph Sundberg (2008). Together they form the theoretical framework of this study. On top of that, the study situates itself within the broader Sport for Peace and Development (SPD) context. The study thus contributes to both the field of SPD and the study of reconciliation. The relevance of the study to the world outside of academia lies in the pursuit of researching ways of moving on from protracted conflicts and exploring any avenue of reconciliation. Following the purpose of the study the research question is as follows:

What role has football played in the post-genocide reconciliation process in Rwanda?

The study is analytical and theory-testing but does not claim to be able to evaluate the impact of football initiatives in Rwanda.

1.2 Background

Context matters and I argue it is important to have a clear understanding of the context that the studied phenomena take place in. Therefore, I will provide a brief background of Rwanda that will include its colonial background and the protracted conflict that ultimately led to the 1994 genocide ¹.

Just as context matters, terminology matters. During the work with this study, I have come to understand that what words are used to describe the events of 1994 in Rwanda is contentious. The name of the events in 1994 has officially been changed in Rwanda from the 1994 Rwandan genocide to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Supporters of this change in terminology stress that a clearer definition of who was the victims fight genocidal denial and theories of a double genocide (UN/GA/12000, 2018). Critiques on the other hand argue that the move erases other victims than Tutsi (Begley, 2016:23). The United Nations have taken a middle road, adopting the official Rwandan terminology but adding the caveat of; ...during which Hutu and others who opposed the genocide were also killed (UN/S/RES/2150, 2014; UN/A/RES/74/273, 2020) I will simply use the term the genocide when referring to the events in Rwanda during April to July of 1994.

In Rwanda, the terms *genocidaires*² and *rescapés*³ are used when talked about the people involved (Donà 2019:13). To avoid confusion, I will use the English terms perpetrators and survivors. When the context calls for it, I will also use the term victim

1.2.1 Pre-1994

The Rwanda of today consists of mainly three ethnic groups, Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. The Hutus are in majority with 85% of the total population and the Tutsi make up 10%. Twa is the indigenous population of the Great Lakes Region and has traditionally been hunter and gathers (UNPO, 2018:1) as opposed to the agricultural Hutu and pastoral Tutsi (Prunier, 1998:5). As with many indigenous

¹ For a comprehensive account of Rwanda's history and the genocide, I recommend Prunier, 1998.

² Génocidaires is defined as someone who took part in the genocide in Rwanda (Lorentzen, 2020:51).

³ Rescapé is defined as someone who survived the massacres and genocide in Rwanda between 1 October 1990 and 12 december 1994 (Donà 2019:28).

populations the Twa have been marginalized throughout history and forced out of their traditional way of life (UNPO, 2018:1-2). This marginalization continues until this day (UNPO, 2018:2, 5-6). The history of Rwanda illustrates this marginalization, where the main political actors have been Hutu and Tutsi. This study recognizes the marginalization of the Twa in Rwanda, at the same time I am not making any claim to lessen this marginalization through this study.

Since the 18th century, the Tutsi have made up the ruling elite of the country, basing their status on land- and cattle ownership. Pre-colonization the division between Tutsi and Hutu was fluid. Marriage between the groups was common, a Hutu could become a Tutsi through ownership of cattle and a Tutsi could become a Hutu through losing his cattle (Harrison, 2018).

A Tutsi kingdom was present within most of contemporary Rwanda when European colonizers arrived in the late 19th century (Prunier, 1998:9). The colonizers based their rule on the existing structures in society and the once fluid social relationships were solidified and the social divides were increased. It is argued that the biggest colonial heritage in Rwanda was the division and formalization of the ethnic groups (Harrison, 2018) That is not to say that ethnicity is the sole reason for the conflicts, but the conflict parties have been formed along ethnic lines.

Exile-Tutsi formed Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1989 and invaded Rwanda in 1990. A civil war was ensured and by 1993 the government was forced to the negotiation table. The UN formed a peacekeeping mission to make sure the peace agreement was upheld by both parties (Prunier, 1998:194). Hutu nationalists and extremists, among them, leading officers and politicians, resisted this and armed militias like the *Interhamwe*, spread anti-Tutsi propaganda and planned what would later culminate in the genocide (Prunier, 1998:200-204).

1.2.2 The Genocide

6th of April in 1994 the president's plane was shot down in the Rwandan capital of Kigali. This became the starting point of the killings targeting Tutsi, moderate Hutu, and others that were seen as a threat. The genocide was stopped by the military victory of RPF (Lorentzen, 2020:51).

It is argued that because Rwanda was a society with a clear hierarchy and a culture of following orders from the top the killings could be conducted (Prunier, 1998:216) One example of this is *umuganda* (community work) that every person in Rwanda was and still is required to do. It is then argued that in the context of the civil war and hate propaganda, that when the orders came to kill the Tutsi, it could be considered umuganda (Prunier, 1998:138-139).

In the beginning stages of the genocide men and young boys were targeted. In the later stage's women would be targeted and the sexual violence by the genocidaires was at an unheard level (Lorentzen, 2020:51-52). Men and women were targeted in different ways, where the men were killed and women targeted with sexual violence (HRW, 2004:7). This does not mean that men were not

raped, and women were not killed (Brounéus, 2008:60), it means that women were targeted in a specific way.

The UN had a peacekeeping force in Rwanda, but they had no mandate to intervene and were ill-equipped (Prunier, 1998:234). The international community's unwillingness to intervene was one of the factors making the genocide possible (Kassner, 2014). When the international community, through France, finally intervened in June the 2500 soldiers deployed was not enough to stop the killings and helped several of the leaders of the genocide to flee the country (Prunier, 1998:291-295).

1.2.3 Post-genocide

The aftermath left Rwanda in a disarray. When it became clear that the RPF would take power nearly 2 million people fled the country in July/August of 1994 (Prunier, 1998:312-313). During the coming years, the Hutu militia would orchestrate attacks from their bases outside of Rwanda into the country (Riches and Palmowski, 2021).

Not all Hutu were involved in the killings (Donà, 2019:12). Based on the number of people that were prosecuted for genocidal crimes, it is estimated that one million people took part in the genocide (Donà, 2019:12). This means that five million people living in Rwanda cannot be categorized as neither survivors nor perpetrators, which will be important when I discuss the reconciliation efforts that have been made in Rwanda.

Since 2001 President Kagame has ruled Rwanda. During his leadership, he and his party have consolidated power in Rwanda and moved away from a democratic transition (Riches and Palmowski, 2021).

From the outside looking in it seems like Rwanda has made significant steps towards a more gender-equal society. Women's organizations established by survivors took a prominent role when society was to be rebuilt. This translated into new legislation protecting women's rights and establishing a 30% quota of women in all decision-making bodies (Lorentzen, 2020:52-53). This seemingly progressive development has gotten some critique. One example is that the policy gains that have been made have not been translated into practice and that women in parliament do not automatically support gender-sensitive policies (Lorentzen, 2020:53).

1.2.4 Reconciliation efforts in Rwanda

The genocide in Rwanda was a brutal event that turned neighbors into killers and rapists. The social fabric was torn to pieces and the challenge of rebuilding the country, exert justice and achieve some sort of reconciliation between perpetrators and survivors, and the rest of the population was and still is immense.

The different reconciliation initiatives are to be understood within the context of the master narrative of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. First, a narrative can be defined as a story that connects certain events in a way that helps people make sense of them (Donà, 2019:1-3)⁴. The understanding of the nation in post-genocide Rwanda is very much based on the master narrative (Donà, 2019:42). The master narrative has in many ways informed and been informed by the reconciliation efforts. The elite actors have in the case of Rwanda pursued a hard line of a single narrative, with no room in the national discourse for alternatives (Reyntjens, 2011:31). This single, national master narrative includes the definition of Hutu as perpetrators (except for heroic acts by individuals), Tutsi as victims, how, who and when to remember, who and what crimes to try in a court of law, and how to move one as a united nation (Donà, 2019:24-36). The critique towards this hard-line national narrative is that it excludes and alienates most of the Rwandan population in the national discourse (Donà, 2019:24, Rejntjens, 2011:31). As mentioned before, around five million people do not fit comfortably in the perpetrator-survivor dichotomy.

Since the stabilization of the Rwandan society, the government has adopted a clear policy of promoting a singular, united Rwandan identity. All are Rwandans, not Hutu, Tutsi or Twa (Brounéus, 2008:57). Even though this stance is taken, ethnicity in Rwanda post-genocide is characterized by ambivalence. On the one hand, all are Rwandans. On the other hand, your ethnic group decides if you are a perpetrator or a survivor (Donà, 2019:13) A clear example of this is the government program of *Ndi Umunyarwanda* which means "I am Rwandan" (Genocide Archive of Rwanda, 2015). As part of the program leading government officials have made public apologies. They would frame the apology in a way that they as Hutu apologized to all the Tutsis, from all the Hutus (The East African, 2013). This confused people since apologies in this way made people mention their ethnicity, breaking the taboo. It was also questioned why people that did not commit a crime should apologize (The East African, 2013), illustrating the problem with the perpetrator-survivor dichotomy.

The government of Rwanda has also established several commissions to deal with reconciliation. The main commission regarding reconciliation is the *National Unity and Reconciliation Commission* (NURC). It was established in 2003 and its goal is to "...foster unity and reconciliation among the people of Rwanda..." (NURC, 2009). Another commission is the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC). The RDRC's main mission is demobilization and reintegration but as they mention on their website "...as to realize national security, reconciliation, and development through demobilizing ex-combatants..." (RDRC, 2021).

To exert justice, the UN in cooperation with Rwanda established the *International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda* (ICTR) in the late fall of 1994. The court had an enormous workload and the prisons of Rwanda quickly filled up with

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⁴ For a more detailed account of how these narratives are formed and what they include, please refer to Donà, 2019.

people awaiting trial (Carter, 2007:42). Because of this, the government turned to the traditional conflict resolution practice of *gacaca*. While leaders and instigators were tried in either the ICTR or national courts, the main part of the perpetrators was heard in gacaca courts (Brounéus, 2008:56-57). It is important to note that the gacaca practice that was used to try genocidaires differ from the original practice of gacaca. Phil Clark talks about modern gacaca as a hybrid that is the result of the needs that stem from the, one the one side, pragmatic need to try perpetrators and, on the other side, also act as truth and reconciliation instance (Clark, 2007:776-777). Since all parts speak their truth and the accused are handed a sentence, in theory, both justice and reconciliation are being addressed.

Gacaca have been celebrated as an innovative way of dealing with terrible crime (Carter, 2007:41) but it has also been criticized for re-traumatization of victims (Brounéus, 2008:71-73), being a forced top-down approach (King, 2019), and not complying with international standards of a fair trial (AI, 2002).

It is in this context that I will analyze what role football has had in the reconciliation process in Rwanda. A context characterized by the horrors committed during the early 1990s and a clear policy of making sure nothing like it will ever happen again by removing the perceived source of the genocide, ethnicity.

2 Theoretical framework and previous research

In this study, several theories and perspectives will be used to create a theoretical framework. This section will provide an account of this and at the same time present previous research that has been conducted about reconciliation and the use of sport in peacebuilding in general.

2.1 Previous research on reconciliation and football

Sport and its peacebuilding capabilities have been researched in several instances and contexts (Clarke, Jones, and Smith, 2021). Cardenas has listed several reasons why sport as a cultural phenomenon seems to have been used more than others. One of them is its universality, another how sport can connect people in an effective way (2013:26). Studies on this theme have been conducted in the Israel-Palestine context where Israeli and Palestinian youth have been brought together to build inter-community relations (Schulenkorf and Sugden, 2011). Another example is how children and youth from different ethnic groups have been brought together to play football in Kosovo to change attitudes and perceptions about one another (Krasniqi and Krasniqi, 2019). Not all research that has been done has concluded that football is used for inclusion. Davide Sterchele has in his study of post-war Bosnia demonstrated how elites in the country use football in combination with ethnicity as a way of enriching themselves (2013).

When it comes to football and reconciliation more specifically, studies have been conducted in several different contexts. It has been conducted in Bosnia (Dutz, 2014), Northern Ireland (Brown, 2017), and Burundi (Mvutsebanka, 2020). The different studies had different approaches and analysis units. Dutz was focusing on how grassroots initiatives can be successful and concluded that football on its own is not enough. For it to be effective it needs to be deployed together with other non-sport-related workshops and seminars (2014:27). Dutz also concluded that where the national level in Bosnia is contentious, as Sterchele concluded (2013:986-987), the grassroots level has a better chance of success (2014:27). Brown on the other hand is focused on a specific protestant football club in Northern Ireland and how their signing of Catholic players signaled that reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants was possible (2017:689-690). Mvutsebanka has focused on the national elite and how they have used reconciliation and football as a way of strengthening their positions in Burundi (2020:707).

In 2008, Kristine Höglund and Ralph Sundberg conducted a study on how sport has been used in the South African reconciliation process. They identified three levels where sport interacted with reconciliation. The national level, the community level, and the individual level (2008:815). Höglund and Sundberg also bring up the problem of how to measure the impact of sport on reconciliation efforts (2008:816). Clarke, Jones, and Smith point out that in 2021 this problem has still not been addressed properly (2021:12). As mentioned before this study does not address this particular gap in the research but aims to contribute to research through exploring another context where sport, football, in this case, has been utilized for reconciliation purposes.

In the Rwandan context a surprising lack of research has been made when it comes to sport in general, and football specifically, within the reconciliation process. Collison *et al* have conducted a study within the SDP context, where they examine transnational partnerships that are active in Rwanda (Collison *et al.*, 2016). Their method is participant observation, focusing on how international and local NGOs work together within the SDP context (Collison *et al.*, 2016:1687).

A study conducted by Didier and Nzeyimana in 2020 targets the gap that I identified. They have conducted a study about how sports have been used for unity, reconciliation, development, and peace (2020). They argue that their paper show how sport, in general, is a force for good in the quest for reconciliation and unity in Rwanda (2020:224). While the article in one some instances contributes with some empirical knowledge around sport and reconciliation in Rwanda (2020:228-229), I argue that it is in many ways biased. I base this on the writer's non-critical use of government sources and the lack of reflexivity in the article. The authors have declared that no conflict of interest is present, while at the same time working for the government of Rwanda (2020:224, 230). Being a government employee and at the same time doing research on subjects regarding your employee is a conflict of interest. This is not a problem by itself but becomes one when not accounted for nor reflected on.

This highlights how it in some instances is good to look at a case from the outside, which this study does. I also argue that a critical eye is necessary when conducting research. While the Didier and Nzeyimana (2020) article can be viewed as a government point of view of the role of sport in the reconciliation process in Rwanda, this study aims at examining both the government and the grassroots use of football in the reconciliation process in Rwanda.

2.2 Sport for Development and Peace

Sport for Development and Peace (SPD) can be understood as a social field where sport is used for goals other than sport development, including but not limited to, peacebuilding, poverty reduction, and empowering of women (Collison *et al.*, 2018:1). SPD became institutionalized in the 1990s, heavily influenced by the UN. Both the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goals (SGD) have had a great impact on the goals and work of

many SPD organizations. The UN has also recognized and promoted sport for development and peace by incorporating it into the SGD's (Collison *et al.*, 2018:2). Within the field, plenty of different actors reside with different roles and relationships to each other. NGOs make up the greatest number but all from the UN, national governments, sports clubs (both local and global), and private businesses have a stake within SPD (Collison *et al.*, 2018:3).

Within the SPD field sport is viewed as a force for good. It is important to remember that sport is not inherently a force for good. Sport can be used for inclusion in society, but it can also be used as a tool for exclusion (Bloodworth, McNamee, and Olivier, 2018:187-188). During my research I have had that in mind, applying a critical eye to the material I have been analyzing.

In this study, I have decided to focus on one sport, football. Football is the biggest sport in the world with 4 billion supporters around the globe (Shvili, 2020) Its popularity in Africa is undeniable(Bloomfield, 2010:15; Giulianotti and Armstrong,2004:14). One of the main reasons for its popularity around the globe is accessibility (Cardenas, 2013:26). Football can be played if you have something round to kick on. That can be an actual football or a makeshift ball made from plastic bags.

2.3 Reconciliation

First, it is important to note that there are several schools of thought on how to deal with violent conflicts. From the narrower conflict management to the broader conflict transformation (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, 2016:34-35). Conflict management tries to control the conflict (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, 2016:34), conflict resolution tries to address the causes of the conflict (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2016:34-35) and conflict transformation tries to transform the conflict on a deeper level (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2016:35). Ramsbotham, Miall, and Woodhouse view these different concepts as different stages in the peacebuilding process (2016:16) where John Paul Lederach views them as different ways of dealing with a conflict, where the conflict transformation approaches offer a more complete understanding of the process (1996:17). Within the broader framework of conflict transformation, one will find the concept of reconciliation (1997:84).

Reconciliation is one of the main theoretical concepts in this study. It is a contested concept that some academics argue is impossible to achieve (Little, 2014:69) and other views as crucial for a lasting peace (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2000:238). I argue that the academics critiquing reconciliation and its usability because of its unattainability have misunderstood the concept. I understand reconciliation as a continuing process that redefines and transforms a hostile relationship (Lederach, 1997:84). As with many social processes, reconciliation is not a simple one with a clear beginning and end. In the case of Little, I also argue that he seems to view conflict resolution and reconciliation as one (2014:52, 69-70) and therefore view reconciliation as unattainable. By situating reconciliation

in a wider conflict transformation framework one can avoid the assumption of an end goal that sometimes comes with a conflict resolution approach.

In this study, I base my understanding of reconciliation on Lederach's conceptualization. Reconciliation as a concept is based around relationships between people (1997:26). Reconciliation is a space where parties to a conflict meet, share experiences, feelings, and perceptions. By doing that they are also creating new shared perceptions and experiences (1997:30) where a shared future is imagined (1997:34). Reconciliation is then both a social space and a process. This process in turn looks to move forward while recognizing the past. As Lederach put it: "Its primary goal and key contributions are to seek innovative ways to create a time and a place, within various levels of the affected population, to address, integrate, and embrace the painful past and the necessarily shared future as a means of dealing with the present." (1997:35).

I am also understanding reconciliation as a process where several different actors are involved. Lederach has divided these actors into three different categories and applied them to a pyramid (1997:39). The top of the pyramid consists of elite actors with high visibility (1997:38-40). The middle of the pyramid consists of leaders and organizations in different sectors that might not have the same visibility as the elite. Their main characteristic is that they have connections to both the top and the bottom of the pyramid (1997:39-42) The bottom of the pyramid consists of grassroots organizations and local leaders who work and live in the thick of it (1997:43).

In addition to theoretical thoughts by Lederach, Höglund, and Sundberg's (2008) conceptualization of on what levels reconciliation efforts take place will be applied. They have identified that sport is used for reconciliatory purposes on three levels in the South African reconciliation process, the national, community, and individual (2008:807). On the national level reconciliation is pursued through national symbols that help build a new national identity and unity (Höglund and Sundberg 2008:807). This can be through sporting events involving the national team or hosting international sporting events (Höglund and Sundberg 2008:808).

The community level is concerned with reconciliation efforts between and within social groups. This can be direct efforts through demobilization and reintegration and indirect through creating opportunities where different groups can meet and socialize (Höglund and Sundberg 2008:811). Sport can then be used to soften group mentality and create relationships between social groups.

The individual level concerns the individual's ability to empower themselves. This is done by creating opportunities through sport for groups that are at risk of marginalization in society or conflicting with the rest of society (Höglund and Sundberg 2008:813). Examples of groups that can be targeted are women, excombatants, and former child soldiers (Höglund and Sundberg 2008:813-14). One important note is that the three different types of actors can engage with the three different levels, for example, elite actors are not locked to the national level but can, and is preferred to, engage with all the levels. This makes the process of reconciliation a joint top-down, bottom-up process (Höglund and Sundberg 2008:815)

To summarize my theoretical framework for this study, I will use Lederach's conceptualization of reconciliation where it is understood both as a social space and a process. Several actors are involved in this process who are conceptualized by Lederach. These actors are the elite actors, middle-level actors, and grassroots actors. In combination with this, I am using Höglund and Sundberg's theoretical thoughts to understand on what levels these actors work on and how reconciliation can happen in a post-conflict society with the use of football. The levels are the national, community, and individual.

3 Method and material

The study aims at describing what role football has played in the reconciliation process in Rwanda. Following the purpose and research question, the study will be conducted as a single-n case study.

The case study will be done through the theoretical framework previously described and the method of qualitative content analysis. By using the method of qualitative content analysis, it allows me to describe what role football has played in the Rwandan reconciliation process.

3.1 Method

The choice of qualitative content analysis as a method for this study has in part been guided by the availability of material. Content analysis is especially suited for textual analysis of official documents (as government reports or program descriptions), cultural documents (as newspaper articles), and personal documents (Halperin and Heath, 2020:374). As I will come back to under 3.2, my material mainly consists of written material from the government of Rwanda, newspaper articles, and material from and/or about different NGOs conducting work in Rwanda.

Content analysis has several benefits. One of them is that the method can help to reduce bias since if I would have conducted interviews, I would have had to deal with the fact that people come to interviews with biases and ideas about how they are to behave in an interview setting (Halperin and Heath, 2020:374). Content analysis is also an unobtrusive method, as opposed to interviews (Halperin and Heath, 2020:374). This showed to be of importance to me since I had the ambition to interview people about football and reconciliation in Rwanda in the beginning stages of the research process. At the later stages of the research process that ambition seems rather naïve since more experienced researchers than me have had trouble conducting interviews in the Rwandan context (Lorentzen, 2020:65).

Content analysis can be qualitative or quantitative, with the former being more concerned with the latent content of the material and the latter being more concerned about manifest content (Halperin and Heath, 2020:376). The distinction between the two is not an absolute one. Boréus and Kohl are differentiating between the two by the amount of counting or measurement that is done. A study can be more qualitative or more quantitively but does not necessarily need to be one or the other (2018:51). I am arguing that this study is a more qualitative one since I am not only interested in the manifest content but also the latent content of

the material. By taking an interest in both aspects and not accepting what is said at face value I can better answer my research question.

Discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis have certain similarities. They are both subjective and context plays an important role since a body of text needs to be understood in the context it was produced in (Halperin and Heath, 2020:287). Even though the two methods have some similarities they are interested in different things. The discursive method takes an interest in discursive practices and how they construct identities and exercise power. The qualitative content analysis on the other hand takes an interest in the meanings, motives, and purposes of political actions (Halperin and Heath, 2020:386). Since the purpose of this study is to examine what role football has played in the reconciliation process, I argue that the qualitative content analysis is the better choice.

3.1.1 Case selection

The main advantage of a single-n case study is the in-depth look one can apply to the specific case (Halperin and Heath, 2020:243). For a case study to be of academic interest, it needs to be a case of something. The social phenomenon that is being examined in this study, and therefore what this is a case of, is reconciliation where football has been used for reconciliatory means. The choice of Rwanda was made based on several factors. The reconciliation process in Rwanda has been extensively researched, as I have shown, but the lack of research made on the role of sport in general and football more specific made Rwanda an interesting case. The reconciliation process there is also an interesting one because of the clear policy of a strong, unifying narrative that removes ethnic identities and constructs a new national identity. Football in Rwanda, as in several parts of Africa, is a very popular sport. The government of Rwanda has taken an interest in football as a way of attracting tourists, by a sponsorship deal with the English football club Arsenal FC paying 30 million GBP to have the Visit Rwanda logo visible, on among other places, the player's shirts during games (Waterson, 2018). This sparked my curiosity and will to examine if this interest in football is translating to other fields of society.

The theoretical choice of Höglund and Sundberg (2008) also played an important role in the selection of Rwanda. By applying their theoretical thoughts to a new context, the external validity of this study increases, while at the same time possessing a high internal validity due to the focus on one case (Halperin and Heath, 2020:234-235).

The spatial boundary of this study is therefore limited to the borders of Rwanda. The temporal boundary is from the 19th of July 1994 to the 13th of May 2021. Since I understand reconciliation as a long-term process, I argue that a period starting just after the genocide ended (Prunier, 1997:299) is an appropriate starting point, with the studies' endpoint going up until the present day.

3.1.2 Operationalization

The theoretical thoughts and the chosen method together make up the operationalization of this study. To know what to look for in the material and enable my analysis I have created a coding frame. The two main categories of my coding frame emerged from my theoretical framework *actor*, and *level*. They in turn have the sub-categories of the *elite*, *middle*, *grassroots* and *national*, *community*, *individual*. The first category is then based on Lederach's conceptualization of actors within reconciliation. The second category is based on Höglund and Sundberg's conceptualization of the different levels where reconciliation efforts take place.

By having these two categories I can say something about what actors are involved and on what levels they work. It also allows me to say something about the perception that actors have about the work that is being done and the relationships between the different actors. What is not said in the material is also an important aspect and will be considered in the analysis. This is in turn in line with the purpose of this study.

The recording unit in qualitative content analysis is usually the whole body of text (Halperin and Heath, 2020:378). The bigger the recording unit is the harder it is to assign it to only one of the sub-categories since they might fit into several of the sub-categories connected to one main category. Since that is undesirable (Schreier, 2014:178) the recording unit used in this study is themes. Themes as a recording unit fit better since my coding is looking for ideas and practices around football and its use in the reconciliation process. A theme then is singled out through the expression about a single subject (Halperin and Heath, 2020:378). For example, within one news article, Rwanda looks to the healing powers of football (Copnall, 2004), the idea about how the national team has been used for reconciliation on the national level is expressed at the beginning of the article. One of the players then talks about how football has been important to him personally. This illustrates how two (or more) different themes can be present in a single body of text. Each of these themes is then coded as national and individual reconciliation levels, respectively. A recoding unit can be coded as both an expression of the actor and the level.

The coding itself was an open coding process, where I let themes emerge as I went through the material, then coding each of them accordingly. The body of text that was less than 50 pages was coded manually with pen and paper, the other digitally with the help of word search to identify the themes more readily. This can cause concern regarding the reliability of the study, where the results can be inconsistent or unsystematic. This is avoided as far as possible by me going over the material thoroughly several times. Because of the nature of the research design, the results will be based on my interpretations and subjectivity will be a factor. By describing the process as thoroughly as I have, I am hoping to increase the reliability of the study.

An overview and description of each category used to analyze the material is presented below:

Actor

Elite

This category applies when a recording unit is describing a reconciliation activity, initiative, or program involving football arranged by the government of Rwanda. This can be through any of the government-initiated ministries or commissions.

Level

National

This category applies when a recording unit can be identified describing a reconciliation activity, initiative, or program involving football happening on the national level. This can be an international tournament or a game played by the national team.

Middle

This category applies when a recording unit can be identified describing a reconciliation activity, initiative, program or involving football arranged by a religious community, religious leader, academics, or prominent activist prominent, someone that has received widespread attention in the media, a player in the national team or anyone else with a large focus on the individual, but not part of the government of Rwanda.)

Community

This category applies when a recording unit can be identified describing a reconciliation activity, initiative, or program involving football happening on a community level. This can be where a positive interaction between different groups is encouraged. Both inter-community and intra-community reconciliation is accounted for.

Grassroot

This category applies when a recording unit can be identified describing a reconciliation activity, initiative, program or involving football arranged by local NGO or local community leaders.

Individual

category applies when a recording unit can be identified describing an activity, initiative, or program involving football happening on the individual level. This means that the empowerment of the individual is in focus, within a reconciliation context. **Poverty** reduction, life-skill training, gender empowerment, HIV/AIDS awareness, sexual education, or personal reconciliation is accounted for.

3.2 Material

The material used for this study is news articles, government documents, statements from NGOs in the form of extracts from their website and newsletters issued by them. Newsletters and special reports from government sources are also used. The news articles have been systematically chosen through the database Global Newsstream. The database provides new articles from over 2800 news sources (papers, wires, etc) and some of the newspapers included in the database is *The Guardian, Financial Times*, and *The Times* (LUBsearch, 2021) The articles were selected for one day where I used the search words *Rwanda, reconciliation*, and *football*. I also searched with the term *soccer* instead of football to increase the scope of the search. I conducted a brief overview of the articles that came up to make sure they were actually about football and reconciliation in Rwanda. In the end, I came up with 30 news articles spanning from February 2003 to April 2021.

I identified the RDRC, NURC, and Ministry of Sport (MINISPORT) as the three government bodies relevant for this study and the documents concerning them was all found on their respective website available to the public. The five NGOs were identified through a search on the website sportanddev.org, where you can find resources connected to the SDP field (Sportanddev, 2021). I then went to their respective website and searched for newsletters and statements around who they are and what they do and how they work. By doing so I was able to obtain material that describes both their view of their own work and accounts of their work. By combining that material with some of the newspaper articles I managed to get a comprehensive overview of the work the NGO: s conduct. I say fairly because not all NGOs have provided a detailed account of the work they conduct through newsletters or program evaluations. This is a potential weakness in the research design of this study, since the NGOs that have a more detailed description of their work risk having a disproportionally big impact on the analysis. I have tried to mitigate this by not drawing general conclusions of all the NGOs based on one of them. It should also be said that the NGO Ishami Foundation was created in 2018 through the merge of Football for Hope, Peace, and Unity (FHPU) and another, non-football NGO. It could then be argued to combine them and treat them as one, but I decided to treat them as two different entities.

By using the new articles, government sources, and NGOs I managed to obtain a material with different perspectives of the reconciliation process in Rwanda and what role football has played in it. A list of all the sources analyzed can be found in appendix 1.

4 Result and analysis

4.1 National level

Höglund and Sundberg (2008) point out that reconciliation at the national level almost always is initiated by the elite actors. As I will show, Rwanda is no exception. Just as sport in South Africa is used to forge a new national identity (Höglund and Sundberg, 2008:807) football in Rwanda has been used to promote the new Rwandan identity without ethnicity.

4.1.1 Elite actors

A common theme is the use of the men's national team, on senior and youth levels, as something to unite around and be proud of. The clearest example of this is the men's team playing Uganda, in Uganda, in an African Nations Cup qualifier in March 2003 (Carlin, 2003). Rwanda needed to win to qualify and did so. It is then described how Rwandans of all ethnicities celebrate together because of this win. Carlin writes: "But now they all danced on the streets, Hutus and Tutsi, genocide killers and genocide survivors." (2003). President Kagame used the success to make a statement about how the victory was for the nation (AllAfrica, A., 2014)

Further, the national team is described as a uniting force by its players, where both Hutu and Tutsi are equally invested in the success (AllAfrica, A., 2014; Carlin, 2004; Copnall, 2004). The captain of the team was at the time Hutu, with his relatives suspected and wanted for genocide crimes. One of the most important players was Tutsi, with his family being killed in the genocide. It is then put forward that football has the power to reconcile, and the two players are examples of the new Rwanda, and something to emulate (Carlin, 2003). The captain himself explains that everyone is watching them on TV and if they can do it, why can't their countrymen do the same? (Copnall, 2004). It is in several articles articulated that the national team is the embodiment of how Rwandans should view themselves. Not as Hutu and Tutsi but as Rwandans working together towards a common goal (AllAfrica, B., 2014; AllAfrica, A., 2016; AllAfrica, C., 2014; Carlin, 2003; Carlin, 2004)

Another important aspect of reconciliation on the national level is the hosting of international sporting events (Höglund and Sundberg, 2008:808). Rwanda has hosted the U-20 African Youth Championship in 2009, the U-17 African Youth

Championship in 2011 (AllAfrica, B., 2014), and the African Nations Championship in 2016 (CHAN) (AllAfrica A, 2016). the tournaments, the national team is being put forward as a symbol of national reconciliation. President Kagame and the First Lady were present at the opening ceremony and the First Lady then attended the first game for the Rwandan team (AllAfrica A, 2016). This illustrates well how the elite actors utilize football events as reconciliation events on the national level.

The government of Rwanda has a clear policy where sport on the hights level is to be utilized. In the Sports Development policy from 2012, the Ministry of Sport (and then Culture) (MINISPOC) writes that sport "Bring people together" and "Improves National pride and unity" (MINISPOC, 2012:7). They reference success from the Rwandan U-17 men's football team as an example of an event that fit that description (MINISPOC 2012:7) clearly illustrating the Rwandan government's perceived benefits to reconciliation, football events, and success in them can have (MINISPOC 2012:6). This view has not changed since then. In the Sports Development Policy from 2020, the same points are brought up (MINEDUC, 2020:12, 33) as in the 2012 policy.

4.1.2 Middle actors

As previously mentioned, reconciliation on the national level is almost always conducted by the elite actors. In Rwanda, I managed to identify one middle actor with the explicit goal of bringing Rwandans together around the national team and then working for reconciliation on the national level. The Fans Club for the national team, with connections both to the elite actors and the grassroots. The Fan Club urges the Rwandan football association (FERWAFA) and MINISPOC for free tickets for their most devoted fans (AllAfrica A, 2016), showcasing the connection the middle actor can be between the elite and grassroots. Representatives for the Fan Club also express ideas about how supporting the national team can bring people together and foster reconciliation (AllAfrica 2016).

4.2 Community level

Unsurprisingly, on the community level, the range of actors is more diverse than on the national level. They range from government reconciliation initiatives between different groups, middle-range actors using football to bring people together to grassroots actors working within their community using football. As I will show, some of these activities might have a more explicit reconciliation purpose than others.

4.2.1 Elite actors

NURC has in several instances together with RDRC used football for a reconciliation purpose. The most prominent use of football can be found in the inter-community work between perpetrators and the community where they are to be reintegrated. Because of the nature of the genocide this community can include survivors who lost their families to the hand of the very same people that are to be reintegrated. NURC is described to regularly arrange football matches with the intention to bring together communities (The Pretoria News, 2010).

One of the earlier football matches with the intent to foster reconciliation arranged by NURC was between perpetrators and survivors in 2004. The game was attended by thousands of spectators, described as being 2000 Hutu and 2000 Tutsi (Carlin, 2004). The earliest indicator of these kinds of games in the material is in February 2003 (Rodrique, 2003). In October of 2008, NURC arranged several football matches including the community and perpetrators. The groups play football together and according to NURC that helps them open to each other (Voice of America News, 2009). Another example of this can also be found in a newsletter published by the RDRC in 2016. It is described how the RDRC arranged the game with reconciliation between different groups in mind (RDRC, 2016:13). The RDRC has established the use of football in an annual tournament aimed to facilitate reconciliation (Nsabimana, 2019). The teams competing in the tournament are made up of both perpetrators and members of the general community (The Rwanda Focus, 2016). A representative of the RDRC views the tournament and football games as part of the reconciliation effort and "a crucial tool in fostering mutual acceptance" (The Rwanda Focus, 2016).

NURC is in the report *Unity and reconciliation process in Rwanda* praising these games as a good way of improving interrelations (NURC, 2016:48-49) (NURC, 2016:48-49). Other than that football (or sport) is not mentioned as a way of working towards reconciliation, which could imply that NURC sees football as an approach limited to these activities previously described. The reconciliation barometer (a report describing the progress of the reconciliation process in Rwanda, conducted as a survey, and released 2010, 2015, and 2020) from 2015 is on the other hand describing the importance of sport (where football is included) activities as a way of promoting reconciliation under its recommendations for further work (NURC A, 2015:120). The policy of the Rwandan government has also been to utilize football on every level. One example illustrating this is the institution of a football cup to promote reconciliation (AllAfrica, 2011). This has in turn been utilized by both middle actors and grassroots actors, with the participation of different teams (AllAfrica, 2011) illustrating how the process of reconciliation can be a joint top-down, bottom-up process.

4.2.2 Middle actors

The middle actors working with football is not always having a clearly stated goal of working towards reconciliation, but I have identified the Rwandan football

clubs as unintentional actors acting on the community level. Reconciliation work is not always as explicit and with a stated goal, but sporting activities can have an indirect effect on reconciliation work (Höglund and Sunberg, 2008:811).

The football games played between the teams in Rwanda have presented themselves as an opportunity for people from different communities to come together and share experiences. The games have then become a social space for reconciliation. One survivor testifies about how watching a game together and hanging out afterward with a beer helped him establishing friendships with other Rwandans, no matter their role in the genocide (Nsabimana, 2021). A former player testifies about how playing football in the wake of the genocide brought people together (The New Times, 2014). Another survivor describes how football games became a space where perpetrators and survivors could come together in the spirit of reconciliation (Goal Click, 2016). There are also instances where middle actors as famous footballers have donated their time to raise awareness of different questions, playing charity games (AllAfrica, 2011). These games are then also social spaces with the potential to be utilized.

Religious leaders and organizations are other types of middle actors, as are academics. Prominent leaders within the Anglican community have put forward the idea that sport (where football is included) is an important avenue for the Anglican community to work for reconciliation (AllAfrica, 2013; AllAfrica, B., 2016). The same sentiment has been put forward by academics in the country (Damas, 2018).

4.2.3 Grassroot actors

Much of the work on the community level is conducted by grassroots organizations. The big difference between elite actors is the perceived beneficiary. The elite actors have a stronger focus on adults, while the NGOs have a focus on youth. It is important to note that NGOs working on the community level usually also work on the individual level. After all, the community is made up of individuals.

FHPU was founded in 2010 by Eric Murangwa. He was a goalkeeper playing on the highest national level in Rwanda and because of that, he was saved during the genocide. His story is well-documented in the news articles in the material (AllAfrica, C., 2014; Targeted News Service, 2016; The New Times, 2016; The East African, 2021). The FHPU state that their vision is to promote community reconciliation and to do that they "... uses the power of football..." (FHPU, 2021). FHPU is described as doing this through partnerships with other NGOs throughout the country (The New Times, 2016). Murangwa himself points to the perceived positive impact football can have on the community and its reconciling ability (The East African 2021). FHPU has a strong focus on the reconciliation process and how, through football, they have the power to transmit that message to their community (Goal Click 2016). The underlying assumption here is that the message will then be disseminated through the participants in their activity to their respective communities.

The Ishami Foundation state that "Using football to build lasting peace in Rwanda is at the heart of our work" (ISHAMI, 2021). They describe their tournament in football that is designed to be a place where people can come together and learn from each other's experiences (ISHAMI, 2021). This is then an example of a reconciliation activity that has the clearly stated goal of bring people together around a game of football and use that to foster positive relationships.

Esperance, another NGO in this study was founded in 1996 and they state that their goal then and now is to use football as a tool for development. Within that, the goal of reconciling the different ethnic groups in Rwanda and the population of the community is brought forward (Esperance, 2021). They mostly work with youth in their community, organizing football games and view the youth they work with as ambassadors of reconciliation in their communities (Esperance, 2014:3; Esperance, 2017:3).

Organization of Women in Sport (AKWOS) is an NGO founded in 2003 with the focus of empowering women with the help of football. As another example of how the community level and individual level intersect it is described how women and girls play on ethnicity mixed teams. This is then in turn perceived as a reconciliation effort on the community level since ethnic division is bridged (AKWOS, 2021).

4.3 Individual level

Individual reconciliation is as previously mentioned about individual development through education, life-skill training, and creating opportunities for marginalized groups (Höglund and Sundberg 2008:813). In Rwanda, football has been used for this purpose, both by elite actors, middle actors, and grassroots actors.

4.3.1 Elite actors

One of the perceived marginalized groups in Rwanda is perpetrators and excombatants. They are therefore viewed as a group that needs individual development to have the tools to step out of the margin in society. In the report *Unity and reconciliation process in Rwanda* ex-combatants participation is perceived to help with post-conflict trauma on an individual level (NURC, 2016:48). This theme is replicated in another report dealing with healing techniques. In that report sport (football included) is put forward as an avenue for individual healing, which is considered part of the reconciliation effort (NURC, 2019:X-XI).

The elite actor in this study that has the biggest focus on reconciliation on the individual level utilizing football is MINISPOC/MINISPORT. In the sports development policy from 2012 sport (football included). Sport is put forward as a tool for individuals to find a solution concerning poverty and reconciliation, among other aspects (MINISPOC 2012:7). Sport is perceived as an empowerment

tool and a clear policy of working for more equity and inclusion in sport is put forward (MINISPOC 2012:17). This aspect is also brought up in the latest sport policy (MINIEDU 2020:9).

Sport as an empowerment tool and something to be utilized on the individual reconciliation level is evidently a policy pursued by the government of Rwanda. Plenty of examples of this have not emerged in the material. The one example is from the RDRC Newsletter where an ex-combatant is expressing the hope of a better life because of the game that was just played and the training he is receiving (RDRC, 2016:13).

4.3.2 Middle actors

The middle actors in Rwanda utilizing football for reconciliation means are mainly religious ones. One of them is the Association of Baptist Churches in Rwanda (AEBR). According to their mission statement they "... aims to play a role in the process of reconciliation..." (Peace Insight, 2021). To attract people from outside of the church they are using sport (football included). They then work with individual empowerment, teaching their participants skills to be used to have them make a living (Peace Insight, 2021) and therefore contributing to the reconciliation effort on the individual level.

The Anglican Alliance is also involved at the individual level. They promote football as a way of educating the youth, empower girls and address reconciliation (AllAfrica B, 2016). As AEBR, they are using football as a way of attracting their participants. In connection to the games, they are arranging they have staff present to talk about social issues and reconciliation (AllAfrica, 2013). As with the community level, academics in Rwanda have a similar view as the religious community on the role of football and reconciliation on the individual level (Damas, 2018).

This illustrates that football is not perceived as a reconciliation tactic by itself on the individual level as it is on the community level. It needs to be accompanied by another activity. Football by itself cannot empower many individuals.

4.3.3 Grassroot actors

The NGOs in this study all have some focus on the individual level. Previously mentioned Esperance gave plenty of examples of how their work with football is empowering the youth they are working with. Several participants testify about the life skills and values they have been taught (Esperance, 2014:2-3; Esperance, B., 2015:4-7) and almost every article in the seven newsletters analyzed contains a theme of individual reconciliation. Examples pertain to education about human trafficking (Esperance, A., 2015:3), HIV/AIDS (Esperance, B., 2015:3), and children's rights (Esperance, B., 2016:2). All these educational moments happened in connection to the youths playing football. Esperance has also taken the learning moments out to the field through their game mode Football Amahoro.

The games consist of six players in each team, three boys and three girls. The teams agree on a set of rules before the game and no referee is present. That means that the teams are to solve any disputes by themselves. Lastly, only the girls are allowed to score as a way of making them become more included in the game (Esperance, A., 2016:2).

On the website of the Kefa Project, you can read how they work with at-risk youth to transform their lives through sport (The Kefa Project, 2021). A closer look at their programs shows the focus on football and individual reconciliation, where an academy for at-risk boys is the flagship project (The Kefa Project, 2021). Even though the reconciliation work is not as explicit in their descriptions the work they are describing is providing a space for reconciliation.

The one NGO in this study with the clearest focus on individual reconciliation through empowerment is AKWOS. Their mission statement reads: "To Empower East-African Women, starting from Rwanda, through Sports and Education" (AKWOS 2021). Among many other things, they are promoting awareness of reconciliation, women's rights, and HIV/AIDS (AKWOS 2021). The founder Felicite Rwemalika describes how football has been utilized to empower women. Football has traditionally been a gendered institution where only men could play. Football is used as an avenue to raise awareness that women and girls can and should be allowed to do things that traditionally have been considered masculine activities (AllAfrica, 2015).

5 Discussion

As I have shown football and its use in the reconciliation effort in Rwanda take many forms. The different actors correspond differently with the different levels. While there is an overarching goal of reconciliation the different actors have different tools available to them. Nevertheless, a common theme is a football being used, directly or indirectly as a tool to bring people together and have them interact and build relationships.

The elite actors use the men's national team as a symbol to come together and meet around. This sentiment has trickled down to the players on the team, that in many ways feel like role models for the new Rwandan identity. On the community level, the elite actors have been utilizing football as a tool to reconcile different groups. While recognizing its importance to individual reconciliation the elite actors have adopted a hands-off approach and are supporting that level through policy decisions.

The supporters club of the national team is an interesting example of how a middle actor can work with the reconciliation effort in tandem with both the elite and the grassroots, understanding the importance of an inclusive reconciliation process. On the community level, the national football clubs have in indirect ways been contributing to the reconciliation effort by providing a social space. The religious community has in turn turned to football in the reconciliation process as a way of getting people together.

The grassroots actors' work highlights how the community and individual level is intimately intertwined. Much of their work is focused on the individual level and through a perceived ripple effect will it contribute to the reconciliation effort on the community level. Through tournaments and games, they bring communities together.

The interaction between the different levels and actors in a reconciliation process is an interesting aspect. What I mean by that is the intra-level, intra-actor, and inter-level/actor aspects. This study has described how this interaction can take place.

5.1 Reconciliation as a social space and a process

Reconciliation is at heart a relational pursuit. One cannot reconcile with the other if the opportunity to build a relationship does not present itself. It is then of utmost importance for reconciliation as a process that reconciliation as a social space is available to the community and the individuals of that community. In my analysis,

I have shown how football has been utilized as a social space in the Rwandan context.

One of the most interesting aspects of this is how football in an indirect way has been contributing to reconciliation in Rwanda. While the national football teams play with the hope that people will come and cheer them on, grassroots tournaments and games between perpetrators and survivors do not contain the same public attraction. It is suggested that these games still attract a crowd and by doing that the games provide a social space for relationship building. Not every game is attended by 4000 spectators and maybe that is not desirable. By creating a more intimate space the climate for striking up a conversation regarding a beautiful goal might be more inviting. A case in point is how the beer after the national club games is brought forward as an important factor in relationship building. Reconciliation is about creating new experiences together and allowing these to take center stage in the relationship between people. This study then suggests that football can assume the role of a social space where parties to the conflict meet and create experiences together, with the explicit or inexplicit aim of reconciling.

Reconciliation as a process aims to deal with the past and look forward to a shared future and using that as a way of dealing with the present. Football in the Rwandan process has been a tool of doing that. Having football games being played near the end of the genocide illustrates that. By coming together as one and watching or playing football, people can imagine a shared future. By expanding that and having football games being played in connection to remembrance periods one can in addition remember and deal with the past together. The strict top-down narrative by the Rwandan government about the genocide and how to reconcile can then benefit and be reinforced. Football games by the national team is a very powerful symbol of reconciliation and unity by a mixed ethnicity team. If that team then is successful, it can have the effect of reinforcing the narrative of how to move forward as Rwandans, as illustrated by the game won against Uganda in 2003.

In the process of reconciliation, football can then be used as a tool by the elite actors. In the same way, we have seen how religious, actors use football as a tool in Rwanda. By utilizing its popularity, they can bring people into the fold of the church and spread a message of reconciliation. The main tool is not football, but other more religious-coded activities are. In relation to that, it is interesting to see how football is being used as a tool of reconciliation in a more practical sense through the grassroots actors. Esperance being the best example with their Football Amahoro.

5.2 Further research

It is important to note that the results of this study do not claim to describe the reconciliation process in Rwanda in its entirety, but only the part where football is being involved. With that in mind, I believe it is possible to draw a few general

conclusions about how sport, in general, can have a role in the reconciliation process. After all, football is a sport among many. Reconciliation is context-dependent and, in a context, where football does not have the same kind of popularity as in Rwanda another sport or sports can theoretically be used for the same purpose as football have been used here. When further research and empirical work is conducted on the same theme it must then consider what sports are popular in that specific context. It might also be the case that sport as a cultural activity is not appropriate and another activity needs to take its place.

Moving forward it would be interesting to conduct more comparative research on how football is being utilized in different contexts, to be able to draw more general conclusions about its use and role in different post-conflict settings. Research on the impact of football on the reconciliation effort in different contexts is also a potential avenue for further research. As I have shown the perceived benefits are many, but this study does not claim to be able to evaluate the impact of the reconciliation efforts made in conjunction with football.

6 Conclusion

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, during which Hutu and others who opposed the genocide were also killed shredded the social fabric of Rwanda. The work to rebuild the country has been massive. Part of that is the ongoing reconciliation work between perpetrators, survivors, family members, neighbors, and communities.

This study has described what role football has played in the post-genocide reconciliation process in Rwanda. It has done so by constructing a theoretical framework from theoretical thoughts previously presented by Jon Paul Lederach and Kristine Höglund and Ralph Sundberg. Material from government sources, NGOs, and news articles have been analyzed with the aim of describing football's role in the reconciliation process in post-genocide Rwanda. The study has shown that football has been a facilitator for meetings and relationship-building between people. A social space has been created around the game of football, both on national, community, and individual levels. The social space is created both in an explicit way as in an inexplicit way.

Further, the study also highlights how football in different ways is utilized as a tool by both the elite, middle, and grassroots actors. This in turn has different consequences depending on which level or actor they are interacting with. Football can be a tool to bring people into the fold and it can also be a concrete reconciliation tool.

Football and its role in the Rwandan reconciliation are not to be overestimated. Football is not inherently a way forward for every post-conflict context. What is needed is a social space where people can meet and interact, build relationships, share experiences, create experiences together and imagine a way forward together. This study suggests that football in the right context can help with that.

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