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The use of a football club as a means of state branding:
The mixed results of Qatar's promotion in France

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Introduction:

On April 12th 2018, the Financial Times published an article on Paris Saint-Germain's financial situation following a formal investigation conducted by UEFA¹ in accordance with the Financial Fair Play Regulations (FFP)². In its article the Financial Times states that European football executives were accusing the football club of "financial doping"³. The club indeed headlined the sporting sections of global newspapers during the summer of 2017 with the signings of football players Neymar and Kylian M'Bappé for the equivalent of €400 million. The single transfer of Neymar showed the new character of football transfers with a deal estimated at €222 million.⁴ Until then, the most expensive transfer was estimated around €105 million,⁵ hence elevating Neymar's transfer to the most expensive purchase in football history. The case of PSG illustrates several trends currently occurring in the European football industry. Firstly, it is an example of the increasing number of foreign actors investing in European football (Madichie 1841). This trend started mainly in 2003 when the Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich purchased Chelsea F.C..⁶ Since then, investors from the United States have purchased Manchester United,⁷ Liverpool,⁸ AS Roma,⁹ and Olympique de Marseille ¹⁰in

¹ Union of European Football Associations

² clubs participating to can spend up to €5 million more than they earn per assessment period (three years)

³ 'PSG 'overstated' sponsorships valued at €200m, says Uefa probe', Financial Times

⁴ 'Neymar: Paris St-Germain Sign Barcelona Forward for World Record 222m Euros - BBC Sport.' *BBC News*

⁵ 'Neymar: Paris St-Germain Sign Barcelona Forward for World Record 222m Euros - BBC Sport.' *BBC News*

⁶ 'Business | Russian Businessman Buys Chelsea', BBC News

⁷ 'Business | Glazer Wins Control of Man United', BBC News

⁸ 'Liverpool Takeover Completed by US Company NESV', BBC News

⁹ 'US Investor Buys Majority Stake in AS Roma', Financial Times

¹⁰ 'Marseille: Frank McCourt Promises £180m Investment after Buying Ligue 1 Club', BBC Sport

France; investors from China have purchased AC Milan,¹¹ and Inter Milan,¹² investors from Qatar have purchased Malaga CF,¹³ and PSG;¹⁴ investors from Thailand have been related to Leicester City¹⁵ and Manchester City,¹⁶ while investors from the UAE purchased Manchester City in 2008, from the former Thai owner of the club. Other actors have also been linked with European football since 2003 with Azerbaijan being linked with Atletico Madrid¹⁷ and RC Lens,¹⁸ and Red Bull creating a network of clubs with their involvement in Leipzig and Salzburg.¹⁹ The second aspect which this article illustrates is the willingness of the UEFA to enforce financial regulations on the clubs participating in European competitions.²⁰ Nevertheless, the research of this paper focuses on the first aspect aforementioned: foreign investment in the European Football Industry. The second aspect is developed in a chapter concerning the failed state branding of Qatar. Qatar is indeed the only country in the examples mentioned before to be directly involved in the governance of a club. While an entity related to the government of Abu Dhabi owns Manchester City, PSG is wholly owned by a subpart of Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, QSI (Dorsey 423).

¹¹ 'AC Milan Sold for €740m to Chinese Consortium in Biggest-ever Far East Investment in European Game', The Independent

¹² 'Inter Milan's Chinese Owner in Talks to Expand Soccer Empire', Bloomberg.com

¹³ 'Soccer-Qatari Sheikh Al-Thani Buys Malaga Football Club', Reuters

¹⁴ 'Qatari Takeover Heralds New Dawn for Paris Saint-Germain', BBC Sport

¹⁵ 'Thai Billionaire's Investment in Leicester City Pays Off', The Wall Street Journal

¹⁶ 'Abu Dhabi Group Buys Manchester City from Former Thai Leader', The New York Times

¹⁷ 'Azerbaijan's Sponsorship of Atlético Madrid Proves Spectacular Success', The Guardian

¹⁸ 'RC Lens to Push Out Azerbaijani Ownership', Futbolgrad

¹⁹ 'UEFA Clear RB Leipzig and Red Bull Salzburg to Play in Champions League following Ownership Issue', FOX Sports

²⁰ 'Financial fair play: all you need to know', uefa.com

This research aims to look at the state branding of Qatar in France. It takes place within the broader question of whether state branding could be successful. Is Qatar's state branding through PSG in France successful? The research focuses on the case of PSG since football has been acknowledged to be an essential element of popular culture and the most popular sport globally (Garcia and Meier 852; Garcia and Amara 2). The aim of this research is relevant to fields of academia and the practice of IR. Concerning academia, there is currently a lack of research concerning the purchase of sports clubs and franchises by state-related actors. The current literature focuses mostly on the organisations of major sporting events, such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup. Some research has been conducted on the strategy of jersey sponsorship and the general 'football diplomacy' engaged by Qatar (Antwi-Boateng 45). However, the subject of state strategy in football ownership has received little academic attention – owing, in part, to the recentness of the topic and the lack of literature on state branding (Dinnie 13).

Concerning the practice of IR and the relevance for practitioners, this research coincides with the increasing globalisation of European football. Football often becomes a stage in which political or societal norms and ideas are highlighted, which sheds light on specific international affairs and relations. The Irish and American national jerseys represented the struggles in favour of LGBTQ+ rights in June 2018,²¹ Didier Drogba put a shirt in commemoration of Nelson Mandela's death,²² the celebrations of Xhaka and Shaqiri during a 2018 FIFA World Cup game against Serbia illustrated the tensions between Serbia and Kosovo²³ for instance. The varied attempts by Qatar to promote its brand is interesting as it shows a desire to become an international player since the coup implemented by Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani in 1995

²¹ 'Ireland and US football teams add rainbow LGBT flag to kit', bbc.co.uk

²² 'Didier Drogba defiant over T-shirt tribute to Nelson Mandela', *the Independent*

²³ 'Xherdan Shaqiri and Granit Xhaka Could Face Punishment for 'political' Goal Celebrations', *The Independent*

(Peterson 748). Qatar's involvement in football and more particularly in France is, therefore, interesting to analyse.

To determine whether Qatar was successful in its state branding in France, this research is divided into four main parts. The first part offers an analysis of two concepts – state branding and sports diplomacy – which are vital to this research. These concepts have to be analysed and discussed in order to understand the strategy of Qatar in France with its use of PSG. By looking at these concepts, the author of this research hopes to establish which factors were crucial for a state to brand itself successfully and which factors could undermine such a strategy. The second chapter focuses on the successful aspects of Qatar's state branding in France. The newspapers '*Le Monde*' and '*L'Équipe*' present the positive portrayal of Qatar here through the acquisition of the club and its symbolic value, the signing of prominent football figures, and the progressive reintegration of supporters within the realm of the club. The third chapter tackles the negative aspects of Qatar's portrayal in France. These include: poor communication from the club, the perception of a lack of fair play on both financial and sporting fields, linkages between the emirate and two corruptions scandals, and finally a 'perceived' disrespect of so-called "French values." The fourth part links these findings of the analysis of *Le Monde* and *L'Équipe* with the academic literature on state branding to give a broader perspective on the success of Qatar. The findings have to be linked with the existing research done on Qatar's foreign policy to put the results of this research into perspective.

Literature Review:

State branding has to be considered in relation to the broader concept of soft power developed by Nye and public diplomacy. Nye is the scholar associated with the concept of soft power, often perceived as its conceptual founder. However, Nye argues that while the concept is perceived as new, it was already acknowledged in 1939 by E.H. Carr (Nye 82). Although the concept of soft power is recent, its implications have historical roots. Nye indeed illustrates this

point by mentioning the historical past of France and Prussia (81). Interestingly enough, Nye uses the example of France to argue that culture enhanced France's power (81). In the light of Qatar's state's investments in popular culture in France throughout the ownership of PSG and the development of the broadcasting network *BeIn Sports*, it seems reasonable that the ownership of PSG and BeIn exemplify substantial pillars of Qatar's attempt of developing its soft power. It makes state branding a component of soft power. Nye defines soft power as "simply a form of power, one way of getting desired outcomes" (82) In another publication, Nye defines soft power as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (256). However, based on the definition of Nye, Qatar is distilling its hard power into soft power by owning the tools of soft power.

The definition of soft power can be associated with the objectives of state branding as Dinnie summarises them. Dinnie summarises the core objectives of state branding in three points. According to Dinnie, states engage in such a strategy firstly to attract tourists, secondly to stimulate inward investments and thirdly to boost exports (17). Another objective for states to use such as a strategy is to change the international perception of the country. To outline the purpose of state branding in simpler terms, its main objective is to make the state more attractive to potential customers. Thus, the recent linkages established by various media outlets on Qatar's support for organisations, widely perceived as "terrorist", would incentivize such a strategy (Samuel-Azran et al, 1101-02). Krzyzaniak summarises the strategy in one sentence by declaring that the "audience perception is the determining factor" (3).

One of the complexities regarding state branding lies in the lack of theorisation on the topic. The concept of branding is deeply embedded in marketing studies and therefore focuses on company branding (Krzyzaniak 3). However, some aspects concerning company branding can also be applied to state branding. Brands are affected by popular culture and societal trends (Dinnie 14), something which can be seen in the public perception of states. A core aspect of

branding is to differentiate one brand from the other. Concerning Qatar, Peterson argues that it was crucial for Qatar to make itself distinguishable from its neighbours (748). It can explain that, while Qatar has used football jersey sponsorship as a state branding strategy, likewise Dubai with Emirates, the emirate has centred its strategy on the purchase and development of PSG. However, this latter resembles the strategy used by Abu Dhabi and its purchase of Manchester City.

While the literature emphasises the ‘natural’ soft power of certain major states such as France or the United States (Krzyzaniak 5), state branding seems to have become a crucial strategy for small states. Scholars encourage small states to develop non-military instruments since they do not have the capabilities bigger states might have (Sulaib 29). It seems therefore crucial for the small Gulf states to engage in state branding to ‘survive’ or ‘exist’ with Saudi Arabia and Iran as neighbouring countries.

Different strategies can be used by states to brand themselves. As Peterson argues, it is crucial for regional players to differentiate themselves from their neighbours (748). The critical component of Qatar’s strategy has been Al Jazeera since 1996 while Dubai has been using its state-owned company Emirates to promote itself internationally. Both strategies aim at presenting their respective emirate as ‘modern’ in comparison to the rest of the Middle East (Sulaib 30). One can see the direct repercussions of state branding strategies in the current diplomatic crises occurring in the Gulf between Qatar and its neighbours. Saudi Arabia and Egypt indeed consider Al Jazeera as a threat. Al Jazeera is deemed to be a reliable source of information in the Middle East, which seems threatening to Qatar’s neighbours as its reporting would be considered as an extension of Qatar’s ambitions in the region. Both Dubai and Qatar have expanded their state branding strategy to European football with Emirates sponsoring several football clubs such as Real Madrid, AC Milan, PSG, Hamburg SV, and Arsenal while

Qatar extended the Al Jazeera network with the creation of BeIn Sports.²⁴ However, the case of Qatar is interesting considering it purchased PSG in 2011. The involvement of state actors in football links the concept of state branding with sports diplomacy.

Like state branding, sports diplomacy is merely one aspect of a soft power strategy which a state can use. With the increasing audiences throughout the last decades, football has become a matter of diplomacy (Boniface 87). As mentioned previously, the concepts of sports diplomacy and state branding are closely linked. Individual states, such as Qatar, use sports diplomacy as part of their state branding strategy. State branding is the primary reason states use sports (Allison and Monnington 107). While the core values of the country are argued to be crucial for a successful state branding strategy, this is not necessarily the case when sports diplomacy is involved. Sports diplomacy moderates the conditions for state branding to be successful. However, this last point is not entirely agreed on by scholars. Some authors, such as Antwi-Boateng have followed a traditional line of thought in which these core values are essential for a successful strategy. It follows the idea that state branding follows the same principle as company branding in which a brand has to deliver the promises it pushes to be associated with (Dinnie 16). Even in this situation, rather than focusing on the actual core values of the states, we should focus on which values the state tries to be associated with. Black and Peacock make it clear that the core values are not crucial in sports diplomacy when they mention the importance of sports diplomacy for authoritarian regimes (2). In the cases related to football, one can look at the cases of China, Russia, Azerbaijan, the UAE and Qatar investing through different means in European football. Nevertheless, one of the aspects which is agreed upon in sports diplomacy is about image building. While the idea is appealing in theory, the success of image building remains difficult to be observed directly. As it is a matter of public perception, the success of image building cannot be quantified empirically. Nevertheless, the strategy of

²⁴ 'Al Jazeera Sport Rebrands as BeIN Sport', ArabianBusiness.com.

Qatar is already being considered as a failure because of the situation concerning migrant workers and the infringement of their human rights (Krzyzaniak 2). In his paper, Krzyzaniak argues that the UAE has been more successful in their strategy than Qatar (2) which is interesting considering that both emirates used the same 'kafala system' which has been denounced by the international community and NGO's such as Human Rights Watch.²⁵

As the case concerning the human right abuses in Qatar shows, the literature concerning sports diplomacy focuses mainly on the organisation of major sporting events, namely the summer Olympics and the FIFA World Cup. These events are analysed within the concept of state branding. However, there are also other forms of sports diplomacy which are discussed in the literature, namely sponsorship and the purchase of clubs/franchises. The Olympics and the FIFA World Cup are the most obvious ways for countries to advertise themselves globally considering the attention these events generate. As mentioned, a state branding strategy might not be successful. Krzyzaniak displays the concept of 'soft disempowerment' in case of a counterproductive attempt at building a thriving state brand (4). The concept is also described by Brannagan and Giulianotti as occasions which "offend or alienate others, leading to a loss of attractiveness or influence" (706). The Olympics in Sydney and London are considered as highly successful by scholars while the Olympics in Sochi, Beijing and Rio are considered as not successful in the case of state branding. Interestingly enough, the Olympics in Sochi and Beijing are argued to be non-successful because of the intolerant image Russia and China showed to the world (Samuel-Azran et al., 1103). This point has to be moderated since it seems that the intolerant image of these regimes is mostly portrayed in Western societies. Nevertheless, the argument made by Samuel-Azran et al. supports the idea by which values remain essential for state branding, even in the case of sports diplomacy.

²⁵ 'UAE: Domestic Workers' Rights Bill A Step Forward', Human Rights Watch and 'Qatar World Cup Workers' Rights to Improve with End of Kafala System, Claims Union', The Guardian

The case of PSG in this context is noteworthy considering that Qatar is hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022 and purchased the club in 2011. The link between state branding and sports diplomacy in the case of PSG is well summarized by Ervine as he declares that “since the takeover of PSG in 2011 by Qatar Sports Investments (QSI), the focus on the local or even the national has become less important as the club has set to establish itself on the European and international stage” (73). Ervine implies that the objective of Qatar might not be France, but rather a global audience, which would contradict the current perception on state branding. State branding indeed suggests that the targeted audience is the country in which the investment is made. Ervine here mentions the European continental club tournaments and makes it clear that the investment in PSG takes place in the broader European football industry.

Sport can be a natural source of prestige according to Allison and Monnington (112). They argue that sport can only produce power marginally; however, one has to consider that their research was published in 2002, before the globalisation of the European football industry.

Methodology:

To analyse the results of Qatar’s state branding strategy in France, and more particularly in sports, it is essential to look at the discourse related to Qatar in France. As it is mentioned by Grix and Brannagan when they refer to the difficulty to look at concrete examples of state branding (251), the same can be applied in the case of the discourse concerning Qatar. Grix and Brannagan argue that research related to soft power, while being academically appealing, was difficult, due to the theoretical ambiguity of the theories related to it (251). Looking at the discourse related to state branding allows analysing the results of state branding in a country concretely. For this research, statements by politicians and public debates led by politicians were not chosen despite their influence on the construction of public discourses. This is due to the sensitive subject of Islam in the current French political discourse and the rise of the Front National in recent domestic and European elections. The Front National, which focuses

significantly on this topic, obtained 21.30% in the Presidential elections in 2017²⁶ while obtaining 17.90% in 2012.²⁷ In addition to Islam, the far-right party also commented on the nature of the new owners of PSG and advocated for the nationalisation of the club.²⁸ The author of this research does not expect significant findings when using this approach. Instead of focusing on the construction of public discourse by politicians, the author of this paper decided to look at the construction of public discourses by national newspapers.

To summarise the objective of this research in simple terms, it aimed to see whether state branding is successful. By looking at newspapers, the author hopes for a more objective perspective towards the emirate than by looking at statements done by politicians. Objectivity cannot be achieved by analysing newspapers. The nature of this research is embedded in subjectivity since it aims at studying the perception of a country through the mean of popular culture. However, the intentions behind statements of politicians or journalist diverge. Statements done by politicians are indeed intended to attract or consolidate an electorate, whereas newspapers are depended on sales. Newspapers are, thus, less ideologically based and can, therefore, offer a more neutral view on topics than politicians. For this reason, the newspapers selected had to be recognised as reasonably neutral and national. '*Le Monde*' was chosen as it is one of the most sold daily newspaper in France and is considered to be the newspaper which is the most read in the country.²⁹ An estimated number of 270,000 copies of *Le Monde* were sold daily in France in 2016. It is also the newspaper which focuses the most on international affairs in contrast to '*Le Parisien Aujourd'hui en France*', which focuses

²⁶ 'French presidential election: first round results in charts and maps', The Guardian

²⁷ 'Marine Le Pen's 17.9% Is Not a Breakthrough for the Far Right.' The Guardian

²⁸ 'Qatar: Nationaliser Le Paris Saint-Germain, La Drôle De Réponse Du FN à La Crise Diplomatique.' Le Huffington Post

²⁹ 'National Daily Newspaper: Most Popular Newspapers France 2016 | Statistic', Statista

mostly on daily affairs and *‘Le Figaro’*, which has a special financial rubric. *‘L'Équipe’* was chosen as it is the leading daily newspaper specialised in sports and remains one of the most read French newspapers as well. Around 230,000 copies of L'Équipe were sold daily in France in 2016. While newspapers do have an impact on the construction of discourse, their impact is limited. Le Monde and L'Équipe do, therefore, not represent the perception of Qatar in France entirely. Nevertheless, as two major French newspapers, they shape public discourse. The image of Qatar represented in these newspapers is, therefore, essential. Van Dijk argues that journalists played a critical role in Critical Discourse Analysis, by having control over mass media discourse (20). As the research treats the state branding strategy of Qatar through the case of a football club, the selection of these two newspapers seems appropriate.

For this research, the author selected articles from these two newspapers, which contained the keywords “PSG” and “Qatar”. The time frame chosen was from July 1st, 2011 until June 30th, 2017. Since QSI purchased the club officially on June 30th, 2011, it seemed rational to start the research from the day after the purchase of the club. June 30th, 2017 was determined as the end-date of the research for two reasons. First, by the time this research was being completed, the 2017/2018 season had not yet ended. Second, June is the last month of a football season while July represents the beginning of the new season. In point of fact, the contract of players ends on June 30th. 78 articles from Le Monde and 48 articles from L'Équipe were therefore analysed and used for this research.

The objective of this research is to see whether state branding is successful or not. To answer this question, it seems crucial to analyse two elements regarding the articles chosen. The first element which needs to be analysed concerns the way Qatar was perceived in Le Monde and L'Équipe. The second element concerns the evolution of how Qatar was perceived in the newspapers. A successful state branding would improve the perception of the state by the foreign audience. Therefore, in addition to looking at the terminology used, the change of

terminology is also analysed. This analysis follows a logic related to Critical Discourse Analysis. By looking at *Le Monde* and *L'Équipe*, the objective is to look at how two major newspapers, which can be described as dominant following Van Dijk's argumentation, can shape the opinion of the readers. The terminology used in both the headlines and the articles is analysed. The findings are then presented in two main chapters, treating the successful and failed aspects of Qatar's state branding through the case of PSG. Each of these chapters are organized through sub-themes, such as the relation between the club and the supporters, the signing of major players such as David Beckham and Zlatan Ibrahimović, the symbolic aspect of the acquisition of the club by Qatar, the poor communication of the club concerning affairs related to its players, the lack of financial and sporting fair play, corruption, and more broadly the disrespect of so-called 'French values'.

For the sake of this research, the company branding of PSG is linked with the state branding of Qatar. The logic behind it goes as follow: the evolution of one will affect the other. Thani and Heenan show the logic behind it when they use the example of the company 'Emirates', as a mean to promote the UAE and more specifically Dubai (1018). Audiences thought the term 'Emirates' meant the UAE rather than the company (Krzyzaniak 11). The link between company and state branding is also emphasised by Ginesta and Eugenio. According to them, governments can use companies and organisations to brand themselves through the mean of football (Ginesta and Eugenio 226). The concept of state branding is heavily based on marketing studies. By becoming a company owned by QSI, Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, in 2011, PSG started being a subpart of Qatar's broader state branding. A positive development of PSG's company branding would, therefore, lead to a positive state branding for Qatar, whereas a negative development of PSG would lead to a negative development of Qatar's public image. It was possible to make such a connection since the entity which bought PSG on

June 30th 2011 is a part of Qatar's sovereign wealth fund (Thani and Heenan 1019). The branding aspect of Qatar with PSG is acknowledged by Samuel-Azran et al. (1105).

For this research, French is the language used in *Le Monde* and *L'Équipe*. However, since this paper is written in English, the author of this paper quotes the newspapers in English. Being a French native speaker, the author of this paper provides these translations himself. Nevertheless, the original quotes can be found in the footnotes on every page.

Successful State Branding

Qatar's involvement in PSG is portrayed positively by *Le Monde* and *L'Équipe* based on three aspects: the symbolic nature of the acquisition of the club by Qatar, and more significantly its financial investment, the acquisition of key players, which have positive repercussions for the sporting performances of the club and the marketing of the club, and finally the approach which the Qatari administration has had with the progressive reintegration of ultras which were excluded from the club before the acquisition in 2011. The combination of these three topics leads to a successful positive branding of Qatar in France. Nevertheless, this chapter only develops one aspect of Qatar's state branding. The following chapter indeed tackles on the negative portrayal of the emirate in the two newspapers. Therefore, this chapter needs to be contrasted with the chapter on the adverse outcomes of Qatar's involvement in PSG to make a definitive analysis of the repercussions of Qatar's involvement in PSG on the emirate's state branding.

Acquisition

Le Monde and *L'Équipe* portrayed the purchase of PSG by Qatar as a victory for its symbolic value. The nature of the new owner (Arab and Muslim) and the far-right past of numerous supporters of the club³⁰ made the purchase of PSG by QSI a successful event for French sports.

³⁰ 'Supporters Du PSG: "Une Violence Qui N'existe Nulle Part Ailleurs".' *L'Express*.fr

Debates concerning Islam and immigration are indeed present in the recent debates in French political debates. The Front National, which focuses significantly on these topics, obtained 17.90% in the Presidential elections in 2012 while obtaining 10.44% in 2007.³¹ After the first official game played at ‘home’ by PSG after the purchase in August 2011, Le Monde headlined by saying that “*Despite its defeat at home, PSG wins against racism.*”³² Le Monde mentions the far-right past of some supporters of the club and shows the dilemma for some supporters struggling between being enthusiastic for the future of the club and the Arabic nature of the new club owners. The dilemma concerning the nature of the owners is shown at the end of the article, when the author refers to a declaration by the Minister of Sports, Chantal Jouanno, who is reported saying that she preferred that the club would remain French, forgetting that the team’s previous owner, Colony Capital, was American.³³ For some supporters interviewed by the newspaper, the purchase of the club by Qatar was considered as ‘*a victory of antiracism*’.^{34,35} The article also mentions a fan who declares that “*The Qataris, they are here for the good of the club, to give it a new dimension*”.³⁶

L’Équipe mentions an event when the Emir of Qatar invited the presidents of the other clubs from the league at the French Tennis Open.³⁷ This event illustrates another aspect of the symbolic facet of the acquisition of the club. While the newspaper did not put a big emphasis on the event, as it is the only publication related to the topic, it shows that Qatar showed respect to the other clubs which PSG competes with. The symbolic aspect of having the head of state

³¹ ‘Marine Le Pen’s 17.9% Is Not a Breakthrough for the Far Right.’ The Guardian

³² « Malgré sa défaite à domicile, le PSG remporte une Victoire contre le racisme’ »

³³ ‘Malgré sa défaite à domicile, le PSG remporte une Victoire contre le racisme’, Le Monde

³⁴ “*une victoire de l’antiracisme*”

³⁵ Malgré sa défaite à domicile, le PSG remporte une Victoire contre le racisme, Le Monde

³⁶ “Les Qataris sont là pour le bien du club, pour redonner une dimension”

³⁷ ‘L’émir du Qatar reçoit la L1 à Roland-Garros’, L’Équipe

inviting the presidents of the other clubs makes the state branding aspect clear. It might not have been the prime intention of Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani; the fact that the event led to a newspaper article makes it clear that the emirate wanted to be portrayed positively, either by the presidents or the newspaper's audience.

Politicians and football supporters alike challenged the image of Qatar in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Le Monde published an article titled '*Fillon and Le Maire target Qatar, which is accused of financing terrorism*'³⁸ when L'Équipe mentioned anti-Qatari movements in Corsica during a football game.³⁹ Nevertheless, Le Monde showed that Qatar wanted to be portrayed differently with its article '*Al-Khelaïfi participated at the protest in Paris*'.⁴⁰ It showed a willingness of Qatar to be portrayed as a state respecting the local traditions in France rather than a state financing terrorism. While Nasser Al-Khelaïfi⁴¹ was not a head of state such as some of the other participants to the march, he is associated with the state of Qatar, since he represented the interests of the state through PSG and BeIn Sports.⁴²

At the end of the 2015/2016 season, Le Monde wrote an extensive article on the accomplishment of the club domestically that season, showing the development of the team since the purchase of the club.⁴³ Never had a French club won the league so early, a success which even the coach considered laborious to repeat. Le Monde indeed quoted Laurent Blanc⁴⁴

³⁸ « Fillon and Le Maire ciblent le Qatar, accusé de financer le terrorisme »

³⁹ 'Une banderole anti-Qatar déployée à Furiani', L'Équipe

⁴⁰ 'Al-Khelaïfi a participé à la manifestation à Paris', Le Monde

⁴¹ Chairman and chief-executive officer of BeIn Media Group, chairman of QSI, and CEO of PSG

⁴² 'Mr. Yousef Al-Obaidly Appointed President Of BeIN SPORTS France', PR Newswire: News Distribution, Targeting and Monitoring

⁴³ 'Football: la saison des records pour le PSG', Le Monde

⁴⁴ PSG's manager from 2013 to 2016

who declared that *“I do not know if we will be able to make this route again one day”*.⁴⁵⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the focus was put on the team rather than the administration of the club or its owners.

The 4-0 win against FC Barcelona in the Champions League in 2017 was praised by the media. Articles such as *‘Champions League: the achievement of PSG against FC Barcelona’*⁴⁷ and *‘PSG (finally) enters a new dimension’*⁴⁸ outline the apparent prowess of the club against a major European club. Le Monde portrayed the game as *“The benchmark game of PSG under the QSI era.”*⁴⁹⁵⁰ The game was supposed to demonstrate the new level which the club had acquired under QSI ownership. It is shown with the quote *‘PSG finally entered a new dimension’*.⁵¹⁵² The game was also praised as it justified the investment strategy of QSI since the purchase of the club. Le Monde mentions the *“pharaonic”* budget of the club for the 2016/2017 season.⁵³⁵⁴

Transfers

The purchase of new football players also led to a positive state branding for Qatar. The rumours concerning the arrival of David Beckham in Paris are an example of this aspect. Le Monde covered positively the potential arrival of Beckham in January 2012. The newspaper published

⁴⁵ “je ne sais pas si on pourra refaire ce parcours un jour”

⁴⁶ ‘Football: la saison des records pour le PSG’, Le Monde

⁴⁷ ‘Ligue des Champions: l’exploit du PSG face au FC Barcelone’, Le Monde

⁴⁸ ‘Le PSG entre (enfin) dans une autre dimension’, Le Monde

⁴⁹ “Le match de référence du PSG sous l’ère QSI”

⁵⁰ ‘Ligue des champions: l’exploit du PSG face au FC Barcelone’, Le Monde

⁵¹ “le PSG vient enfin d’entrer dans une autre dimension”

⁵² ‘Le PSG entre (enfin) dans une autre dimension’, Le Monde

⁵³ 560 million euros

⁵⁴ ‘Le PSG entre (enfin) dans une autre dimension’, Le Monde

two articles named *'David Beckham, PSG's new icon?'*⁵⁵ and *'David Beckham at Paris or the end of the financial equity'*.⁵⁶ David Beckham was presented as being more than a football player. Le Monde reported a citation from Leonardo, the director of football of the club, saying *"The door is open, he is more than a football player, he is a brand, a pop-star"*.⁵⁷⁵⁸ The branding aspect of David Beckham in Paris was also emphasised by the title of a paragraph named *'Ambassador player.'*⁵⁹⁶⁰ Despite the debates on the decency of his salary, the arrival of David Beckham was also portrayed as positive for French football. David Beckham was the getaway for French football to enter the Asian market.⁶¹ Even though Beckham went to Paris one year later, the rumours concerning him showed for the media the new dimension PSG just acquired.

The continuing involvement of Qatar in PSG helped in the fostering of a positive image of the country. L'Équipe published an article named *'Paris changes galaxy'*⁶² to illustrate the impact Qatar has had on the development of the club. Le Monde followed the same trope when they released the article named *'PSG's metamorphosis'*.⁶³ On the one hand, L'Équipe focused on the sporting aspect and praised PSG for now being able to attract major football players. The citation *"the club from the capital has definitely changed galaxy Saturday evening with the*

⁵⁵ 'David Beckham, nouvelle icône du PSG?', Le Monde

⁵⁶ 'David Beckham à Paris ou la fin de l'équité financière', Le Monde

⁵⁷ *"La porte est ouverte, il est plus qu'un joueur de football, c'est une marque, une pop-star"*

⁵⁸ 'David Beckham, nouvelle icône du PSG ?', Le Monde

⁵⁹ « Joueur ambassadeur »

⁶⁰ 'David Beckham, nouvelle icône du PSG ?', Le Monde

⁶¹ 'David Beckham à Paris ou la fin de l'équité financière', Le Monde

⁶² 'Paris change de galaxie', L'Équipe

⁶³ « La métamorphose du PSG »

*formalisation of Thiago Silva's transfer*⁶⁴ illustrates the apparent new dimension gained by the club by acquiring the Brazilian player, described as PSG's "*first star*".⁶⁶ Le Monde, on the other hand, outlined the new image PSG gained after winning the national championship (Ligue 1) in May 2013, the first one since the purchase of the club by QSI. While the failure of the club to win all the domestic cups is developed in the article as well, the main focus is on the new nature of the club, which has to become "*a global brand*"⁶⁸ according to Le Monde.⁶⁹ This new aspect of the club is mentioned when 'old' supporters are interviewed and declare that "*PSG is considered as a brand for foreign tourists to buy jerseys*".⁷⁰ This illustrates the new dimension the club had acquired. While some supporters felt left out, a subject which is developed in further details at the end of this chapter, it shows the branding strategy adopted by QSI.

The 2012/2013 saw the arrival of players such as Zlatan Ibrahimović and David Beckham to PSG. Their arrivals were praised by the French press. Le Monde showed it by publishing two articles named "*Beck's*", *the new front display of the PSG franchise*⁷² and '*Zlatan Ibrahimović, the dynamiter of PSG*'.⁷³ The transfer of Zlatan Ibrahimović to PSG was

⁶⁴ "le club de la capitale a définitivement changé de galaxie samedi soir avec l'officialisation du transfert de Thiago Silva"

⁶⁵ 'Paris change de galaxie', L'Équipe

⁶⁶ "première star"

⁶⁷ 'Paris change de galaxie', L'Équipe

⁶⁸ "une marque mondiale"

⁶⁹ 'La métamorphose du PSG', Le Monde

⁷⁰ "le PSG est considéré comme une marque pour que des touristes étrangers achètent des maillots"

⁷¹ 'La métamorphose du PSG', Le Monde

⁷² "'Beck's", la nouvelle tête de gondole de la franchise PSG', Le Monde

⁷³ 'Zlatan Ibrahimovic, le dynamiteur du PSG', Le Monde

considered as a transfer to increase the quality of the team. It was illustrated when the journalist argued that *“the thirty years old represents a decisive argument for Parisian leaders willing to justify an expensive summer recruitment.”*⁷⁴ On the other hand, the arrival of David Beckham during the January transfer period for only half a season was perceived as a marketing strategy for the club, and therefore Qatar as well. The article starts by explaining the impact which the arrival of certain Brazilian players to PSG has had on the audiences of the Ligue 1 in Brazil.⁷⁶ The article then continues by explaining that the arrival of David Beckham was supposed to increase the audience of the Ligue 1 globally, which was under the responsibility of the president of Al Jazeera Sports and BeIn Sports, Nasser Al-Khelaïfi, who was also the president of PSG. Al-Khelaïfi was indeed also the president of BeIn Sports, which was responsible of the broadcasting rights of the Ligue 1 globally. However, the objective for the club, more than increasing the audience for the Ligue 1 abroad, was to export the brand ‘PSG’ internationally.⁷⁷ To do so, Le Monde quotes the general manager of PSG, Jean Claude Blanc, who declared *“we are creating a global brand within sports.”*⁷⁸ The article also argued that the brand David Beckham was far more developed than the brand PSG at this point.⁷⁹

The period related to the end of Zlatan Ibrahimović’s contract with the club also shows the success of Qatar’s branding strategy. Despite the inability of the club to win any title on the European level, Zlatan Ibrahimović was praised for the national success and the new stature the club gained during his presence. Le Monde framed it by presenting him as *‘The icon Zlatan,*

⁷⁴ “le trentenaire représente un argument décisif pour des dirigeants parisiens soucieux de justifier un recrutement estival onéreux”

⁷⁵ ‘Zlatan Ibrahimovic, le dynamiteur du PSG’, Le Monde

⁷⁶ “‘Beck’s’, la nouvelle tête de gondole de la franchise PSG’, Le Monde

⁷⁷ “‘Beck’s’, la nouvelle tête de gondole de la franchise PSG’, Le Monde

⁷⁸ “nous sommes en train de créer une marque mondiale dans le sport”

⁷⁹ “‘Beck’s’, la nouvelle tête de gondole de la franchise PSG’, Le Monde

“*king of excessiveness*”⁸⁰ and by describing his final game as *‘The “jubilee” of Zlatan Ibrahimović with PSG’*.⁸¹ Zlatan Ibrahimović was presented as a success for the club and its owners by Le Monde, both in sportive and economic fields.⁸² Even François Hollande commented on the departure of Ibrahimović after his last game, saying *“He gave a new dimension to the Ligue 1. He almost crushed it with his talent”*.⁸³⁸⁴ Le Monde showed the special nature of Ibrahimović’s personality, when it described him as *“king of excessiveness”*,⁸⁵ but also showed the popularity of the player in France. When mentioning the coming game from Ibrahimović’s national team in France, Le Monde claimed that Ibrahimović *“will monopolise the applause”*⁸⁶⁸⁷ for instance.

Supporters

The 2012/2013 season ended with PSG winning the Ligue 1 after failing to do so the previous season. The club had the intention to celebrate the title with its supporters on the Trocadero square next to the Eiffel Tower. Due to violent clashes between Parisian supporters, the celebration did not go as expected. The administration of the club condemned the violence and

⁸⁰ « L’icône Zlatan, “roi” de la démesure »

⁸¹ « Le “jubilé” de Zlatan Ibrahimovic avec le PSG »

⁸² ‘Les adieux au Parc de l’icône Zlatan, “roi” de la démesure’, Le Monde

⁸³ “Il a donné du relief à la Ligue 1. Il l’a presque écrasée de son talent”

⁸⁴ ‘Le “jubilé” de Zlatan Ibrahimovic avec le PSG’, Le Monde

⁸⁵ “roi de la démesure”

⁸⁶ “monopolisera encore les applaudissements”

⁸⁷ ‘Le “jubilé” de Zlatan Ibrahimovic avec le PSG’, Le Monde

showed support for the police forces, which was perceived positively by L'Équipe. The newspaper quoted the terms “*disaster*”⁸⁸ and “*shame*”⁸⁹ applied by Nasser Al-Khelaïfi.⁹⁰

The reintegration of some of the ultras who were involved in the Trocadero events of 2013 was positively highlighted by the press. Le Monde mentioned it in two articles, namely ‘*PSG: the return of ultras in the Parc des Princes is becoming materialised*’⁹¹ and ‘*PSG-Barcelona: the smooth return of Ultras in the Parc des Princes*’.⁹² While ultras were forbidden to enter the Parc des Princes since 2010, the club is depicted as wanting to integrate these fans in its stadium in a progressive manner. It was portrayed by Le Monde as a willingness of the club done in accordance with the police authorities of Paris.⁹³ In another article on the topic, the president of PSG Al-Khelaïfi is praised for his involvement in the reintegration of the ultras. Le Monde interviewed a sociologist specialised on football ultras who claimed that the reintegration of ultras was crucial in the branding of PSG.⁹⁴ As it is later developed in this paper, Qatar is often confronted with what media consider as local traditions. The reintegration of some ultras is therefore considered as positive for the club and the administration since it showed a certain empathy towards a fringe of supporters, which were not included in the development plan of QSI. However, other aspects, which are considered to be as local traditions by the media, do not allow Qatar to be entirely successful in its branding. These aspects are mainly corruption,

⁸⁸ “*désastre*”

⁸⁹ “*honte*”

⁹⁰ ‘Al-Khelaïfi: “Une honte”’, L'Équipe

⁹¹ ‘PSG: le retour des ultras au Parc des Princes se concrétise’, Le Monde

⁹² ‘PSG-Barcelone : le retour en douce des Ultras au Parc des Princes’, Le Monde

⁹³ ‘PSG: le retour des ultras au Parc des Princes se concrétise’, Le Monde

⁹⁴ “Nasser Al-Khelaïfi vend au Qatar la vitrine d’un grand club, et la réalité des tribunes du Parc ne cadrerait pas avec cette image. (...) Les Qataris ont compris que, s’il n’y avait pas de passion, le produit perdait de sa valeur”

‘PSG-Barcelone: le retour en douce des Ultras au Parc des Princes’, Le Monde

human rights abuses and financial fair play. The above-mentioned topics are non-exhaustive and only represent a fragment of the reasons which participate in the soft disempowerment of Qatar. It illustrates the argument made by Antwi-Boateng which consider values as crucial for a successful state branding (48) and goes against the position of Black and Peacock on this matter (2).

Failed state branding

While the involvement of Qatar through QSI in PSG has been portrayed in *Le Monde* and *L'Équipe* as explicit state branding in a favourable eye, concerning topics such as the acquisition of the club and its symbolic aspects for France, the acquisition of significant players which showed the willingness of Qatar to invest in France, and the strategy of the new administration to deal with new and old fans. However, some aspects of the state branding strategy of Qatar have also been portrayed as negative by the same newspapers. To be more precise, Qatar has been portrayed negatively throughout four central themes which are developed in this chapter. The four themes are: communication, lack of sporting and financial fair play, corruption, and a broader disrespect of French values. These four themes are related to topics which were developed in the first chapter of this research. Indeed, the state branding of Qatar in France has been portrayed as such by the French press. However, the state branding can also be negative, thus explaining the term “soft disempowerment” (Krzyzaniak 4; Brannagan and Giulianotti 706).

Values/Bad Communication

Qatar is portrayed as an actor who does not respect French values, or at least as an actor who does not fit in the French society entirely. While the financial capabilities of the club were acknowledged, as the portrayal of some players showed, some of their repercussions were portrayed negatively in the press. The financial aspect of Qatar was outlined by *Le Monde* in

an article comparing the French club with Manchester City.⁹⁵ The two clubs were presented as taking part in a strategy of both Qatar and the UAE to brand their emirates. It is first mentioned in the introductory paragraph, saying that “*The shadow of Qatar and Abu Dhabi is present in the second-leg game between Manchester City and Paris-Saint Germain in the quarter-final*”.⁹⁶ The French media criticises the English sporting press for overlooking the nature of Abu Dhabi and the violation of human rights occurring in the emirate. Le Monde argues that the situation was worse in Abu Dhabi than in Qatar and that both emirates were using their respective European club as a mean to attract tourists, illustrating the importance of how the emirates are portrayed in the countries they are investing.⁹⁷

The riots which occurred on the Trocadero square during PSG’s celebration of their first national title since the purchase of the club by QSI led to Le Monde headlining “*PSG trapped in its communication operation*”.⁹⁸ The newspaper outlined the reasons why the club decided to organise such an event before explaining that the repercussions of the riot would be on the city of Paris and France rather than Qatar.¹⁰⁰ However, the newspaper acknowledges the responsibility of Qatar, and more particularly the size of their investment in a short amount of time. A marketing expert questioned by Le Monde declared that “*the money from the Qataris*

⁹⁵ ‘Manchester City-PSG : le « golfico » de la Ligue des champions’, Le Monde

⁹⁶ “l’ombre du Qatar et d’Abu Dhabi plane sur le match retour entre Manchester City et le Paris-Saint-Germain en quart de finale”

⁹⁷ ‘Manchester City-PSG : le « golfico » de la Ligue des champions’, Le Monde

⁹⁸ ‘Le PSG pris au piège de son opération de communication’, Le Monde

⁹⁹ “Le PSG pris au piège de son opération de communication”

¹⁰⁰ “Des stars comme Ibrahimovic et Beckham, un décor de carte postale avec la Tour Eiffel en arrière-plan, et une dizaine de milliers de supporters pour les applaudir” – “Stars such as Ibrahimovic and Beckham, a postcard setting with the Eiffel Tower in the background, and ten thousands supporters to applaud them”

*exert a feeling of repulsion and fascination on French people. It is a reaction to the economic situation of France”.*¹⁰¹

L'Équipe also argued that the events were portrayed as being French in the Qatari press.¹⁰² The argumentation lies in the fact that the rioters came from the 'banlieues' and had, therefore, nothing to do with Qatar. The portrayal of the event in such ways give the reader the feeling that Qatar does not take responsibility for the events. While, as it was developed in the previous paragraph, Al-Khelaïfi supported the French state, the general portrayal of Qatar during the events shows that the emirate is not interested in taking the blame for negative outputs due to their involvement.

Another event led to PSG and its administration to be portrayed in a negative eye by the press. In September 2016, Serge Aurier, playing for the club since 2014, was condemned by a court for violence against a police officer.¹⁰³ While the newspaper mentions the official support of the club for the player, it also reminds the reader of the previous event of Serge Aurier which affected the image of the club. Aurier previously insulted some staff members and players on the social media 'Périscopie'. For Le Monde, the club was harsher on Aurier the first time during the 'Périscopie' than during the second affair.¹⁰⁴

The explicit state branding is mentioned in the press when the agreements between the club and the QTA (Qatar Tourism Authority) are mentioned. The agreements are mentioned in the article comparing Manchester City and PSG¹⁰⁵ and in an article implying that the club was

¹⁰¹ "l'argent des Qataris exerce un sentiment de répulsion et de fascination sur les Français. Il fait écho à la situation économique de la France"

¹⁰² 'Qatar: "Un problème franco-français', L'Équipe

¹⁰³ 'L'affaire Aurier renforce la tension au PSG', Le Monde

¹⁰⁴ 'L'affaire Aurier renforce la tension au PSG', Le Monde

¹⁰⁵ 'Manchester City-PSG : le « golfico » de la Ligue des champions', Le Monde

pressured by the French National Assembly.¹⁰⁶ PSG was indeed accused by the National Assembly to have signed a fake sponsoring contract with QTA which would mean that “*PSG does not respect fair-play, boosts its accounts not to lose money and deserve to be sanctioned*”.¹⁰⁷

While David Beckham ended up signing for the club in January 2013, the failure of the club to sign him the year before led to the press discrediting PSG. The press indeed announced the arrival of Beckham before the club announced that Beckham decided to stay in Los Angeles. While family reasons are presented to be the reason for David Beckham not joining the French club, Le Monde also argued that the trainer, Carlo Ancelotti, was not enthusiastic about signing the player.¹⁰⁸ According to L'Équipe, the player had the intention to sign;¹⁰⁹ however, the newspaper also announced that the player was on the verge of signing a new contract with his club in Los Angeles.

The failure in signing Beckham in 2012 can be considered as PSG lacking significance in Europe compared to other clubs. To develop its international standing, it is crucial for the club to perform well in the Champions League, which is also the primary objective for the club.¹¹⁰ However, the club has been underperforming, according to the press. In 2016, Le Monde headlined with ‘*The big waste of the “Zlatan generation”*’.¹¹¹ The recurrence of the underperformance is outlined when the journalist declared that “*PSG has been eliminated*

¹⁰⁶ ‘Le PSG dans le viseur des députés’, Le Monde

¹⁰⁷ “PSG ne respecte pas le fair-play, gonfle ses comptes pour être à l’équilibre et mérite d’être sanctionné”

¹⁰⁸ “Du côté du PSG, le nouvel entraîneur, Carlo Ancelotti, n’était probablement pas aussi chaud que son directeur sportif Leonardo pour enrôler l’Anglais, vieillissant”, ‘Beckham et le PSG, beaucoup de bruit pour rien’, Le Monde

¹⁰⁹ “David avait très envie de venir à Paris”, ‘Beckham au PSG, c’est mort’, L’Équipe

¹¹⁰ ‘Manchester City-PSG : le « golfico » de la Ligue des champions’, Le Monde

¹¹¹ ‘Le grand gâchis de la « génération Zlatan »’, Le Monde

again".¹¹²¹¹³ The topic is again mentioned when the newspaper analysed the three seasons where Laurent Blanc was the trainer.¹¹⁴ The previous year, the same newspaper declared that the recurring elimination in the quarterfinals showed the limits of Qatar's project.¹¹⁵

Unfair competition

- Financial

The disrespect of the Financial Fair Play (FFP) is an important topic in *Le Monde* and *L'Équipe*. As it related to the agreements between PSG and QTA, this topic was developed in 2013 and 2014. The club is portrayed as cheating on the rules implemented by the UEFA. For *Le Monde*, the problem for the agreements between PSG and QTA lies in the common majority stakeholder of both entities, which is the state of Qatar.¹¹⁶ The second critical issue according to *Le Monde* lies in the agreements themselves. Through the agreement, QTA was supposed to sponsor PSG up to 200 million euros per season, while the biggest sponsorship agreement for a European football club at that moment concerned Manchester United and Chevrolet, with an agreement representing 65 million euros per season.¹¹⁷ *Le Monde* mentioned apparent pressures from other European clubs to sanction PSG, and more specifically by mentioning the German club Bayern Munich. Interestingly enough, *L'Équipe* published a short article more than a year before, in which the newspaper quotes the president of Bayern Munich Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, where he asks for PSG to not cheat on the FFP.¹¹⁸ He also claimed that "*the image of Qatar suffers*

¹¹² 'Le grand gâchis de la « génération Zlatan »', *Le Monde*

¹¹³ "le PSG a encore été éliminé"

¹¹⁴ 'PSG: le bilan aux deux visages de Laurent Blanc', *Le Monde*

¹¹⁵ 'Ligue des champions: les limites du PSG version qatarie', *Le Monde*

¹¹⁶ 'Le PSG sanctionné pour son manqué de fair-play... financier', *Le Monde*

¹¹⁷ 'Le PSG sanctionné pour son manqué de fair-play... financier', *Le Monde*

¹¹⁸ 'Rummennigge attaque le PSG', *L'Équipe*

dramatically because of its involvement in PSG".¹¹⁹ In April 2014, Jean-Claude Blanc¹²⁰ gave an interview in L'Équipe, where he defended the sponsorship deal by mentioning the concept of 'nation branding'.¹²¹ Blanc acknowledged that the agreement could be questioned when he declared that *"people are allowed to ask questions since this contract is the first one in its kind and represent an important amount"*.¹²²

- Sporting

The domination of PSG in domestic competitions also contributed to the press presenting the Qatari involvement in PSG as negative. While the club was not able to win the Ligue 1 in the first year after the purchase of the club, the successive successes of the club in French competitions led to Le Monde writing two articles questioning the benefits of having major investors in French football. It is made clear in the title *"Football: How PSG killed the Ligue 1"*¹²³ and mostly subtly in the title *"PSG and Monaco will harm the Ligue 1, according the boss of German football"*.¹²⁴ Le Monde points out in both articles how unbalanced the league became with the development of the Parisian team. The substantial lead of PSG in the league so early in the season made the newspaper say the objective was not domestic but European. Le Monde mentioned the president of a French club competing in the Ligue, who declared that French football was going through a crisis despite PSG's success.¹²⁵ This point was also made

¹¹⁹ "l'image du Qatar souffre de manière dramatique à cause de son engagement dans le Paris-Saint-Germain"

¹²⁰ General Manager and Marketing executive of PSG

¹²¹ 'Fair-play financier: le PSG se défend "avec fermeté', Le Monde

¹²² "les gens ont le droit de s'interroger parce que ce contrat est le premier de ce genre et parce que son montant est important"

¹²³ 'Football : Comment le PSG a tué la Ligue 1', Le Monde

¹²⁴ 'Le PSG et Monaco nuiront à la Ligue 1, selon le patron du foot allemand', Le Monde

¹²⁵ "le Qatar a des moyens illimités. S'il le fallait, il mettrait 700 millions d'euros de budget sur la table. Son objectif n'est pas de gagner vingt-cinq fois le championnat mais de remporter la Ligue des champions. On

by the head of the German league in an interview reported by Le Monde. According to him, the main risks lie in the artificial input of money in clubs such as PSG and Monaco.¹²⁶

Corruption

Qatar is linked with different affairs related to corruption between 2011 and 2017 in the French press. While these affairs are mainly concerning domestic issues within the FIFA and the UEFA, Le Monde and L'Équipe linked these affairs with Qatar. Qatar is indeed linked to two major corruption-related affairs: the attribution of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to the emirate, and the power struggle between Sepp Blatter¹²⁷ and Michel Platini.¹²⁸ These issues are not directly related to Qatar's involvement in PSG; however, its involvement in these affairs is related to Qatar's broader strategy of investing in football. The first aspect of this chapter, the so-called 'Qatargate', a terminology used by Le Monde which can be considered as a reference to the 'Watergate', is mostly concerned with struggles between the FIFA and France. However, while Qatar is portrayed by Le Monde as having used the ways which the FIFA allowed, the emirate is linked with this affair with matters of corruption.

- 'Qatargate'

Noticeably, the attribution of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to Qatar was portrayed as a clear political move by the FIFA, involving an explicit involvement of France in the process. It was developed in L'Équipe with articles mentioning public disagreements between Sepp Blatter and Nicolas Sarkozy. In its articles "*FIFA: Blatter clarifies his accusation against Platini and*

souhaite le meilleur au PSG mais il est l'arbre qui cache la forêt. Le foot français de clubs est en crise. Il n'y a jamais eu autant d'écart budgétaire dans d'autres pays européens", 'Football: Comment le PSG a tué la Ligue 1', Le Monde

¹²⁶ 'Le PSG et Monaco nuiront à la Ligue 1, selon le patron du foot allemand', Le Monde

¹²⁷ President of the FIFA from 1998 to 2015

¹²⁸ President of the UEFA from 2007 to 2015, candidate for the FIFA presidential election of 2016

Sarkozy” and *“FIFA: Nicolas Sarkozy replies to Sepp Blatter”*, the newspaper outlined the political struggle between the former French head of state and the football organisation. Qatar is not presented as an active actor in these articles, but rather as an actor who used its connections with Sarkozy to obtain its objective. It is explicit in the sentence *“The hypothesis of a pressure of Nicolas Sarkozy, close to the emir of Qatar, on Michel Platini is nothing new”*.¹²⁹ While the issue at stake is not directly related to PSG, both *Le Monde* and *L'Équipe* mention a meeting at the Elysée Palace where Nicolas Sarkozy would have pressured Michel Platini to vote for Qatar for the attribution of the World Cup while representatives of the emirate were also present in addition to the former president of PSG at the period. The reunion is set to have occurred six months before the purchase of the club by QSI, on November 23rd 2010. *Le Monde* argued that the purchase of PSG was the result of France supporting Qatar’s candidacy for the 2022 FIFA World Cup.¹³⁰ Qatar is indeed perceived as the country which bribed members of FIFA’s executive board to win the right to host the major sporting event. *Le Monde* mentions the suspension of Qatari Mohammed Bin Hammam due to corruption.¹³¹

Qatar is here portrayed as the chief troublemaker, while using the flaws of the FIFA organisation to reach its objective. *Le Monde* mentions Luc Dayan who is presented as being close to the Qatari authorities who stated *“the Qataris have only applied historical methods of this environment. The shortcomings and the incoherencies of sports governance are permanently exploited”*.¹³²

¹²⁹ “La these d’une pression de Nicolas Sarkozy, proche de l’émir du Qatar, sur Michel Platini n’a rien de nouveau”, ‘FIFA: Blatter precise son accusation contre Platini et Sarkozy’, *L'Équipe*

¹³⁰ ‘Le déjeuner qui a conduit le Mondial au Qatar’, *Le Monde*

¹³¹ ‘Ce “Qatargate” qui ébranle la FIFA’, *Le Monde*

¹³² “Les Qataris n’ont fait qu’appliquer des méthodes historiques dans ce milieu. Les insuffisances et les incohérences des modes de gouvernance du sport sont en permanence exploitées”, ‘Ce “Qatargate” qui ébranle la FIFA’, *Le Monde*

Le Monde and L'Équipe portrayed the corruption scandal related to the attribution to the 2022 FIFA World Cup with the power struggle within the FIFA between Michel Platini and Sepp Blatter.

- Platini-Blatter

One of the main aspects of the 'Qatargate', according to Le Monde and L'Équipe, was the connection between Qatar and Michel Platini. While both newspapers developed heavily on the personal litigation between Platini and Blatter, the connection between Platini and Qatar changed the image of both the emirate and Platini. Le Monde made a headline concerning it, assuming that the personal struggle between the two politicians was at the root of the 'Qatargate', with the title "*Behind the 'Qatargate', the war Blatter-Platini*".¹³³ The article starts by mentioning "*the big corruption suspicions which continue to grow on Qatar since the small emirate obtained, on December 2nd 2010, the organisation of the 2022 World Cup.*"¹³⁴ Qatar is presented as a weapon for Blatter to use against Platini,¹³⁵ supporting the idea of Platini being corrupted or being under pressure by both France and Qatar.

Corruption and Qatar started headlining during the 2012/2013 season with the article from Le Monde titled "*This 'Qatargate' which shakes FIFA*".¹³⁶ However, the topic continued to be part of the press reports until the 2015/2016 season. It was due to the official candidacy of Michel Platini during this particular season whereas the previous season was concerned with backroom talks.

¹³³ 'Derrière le "Qatargate", la guerre Blatter-Platini', Le Monde

¹³⁴ "les lourds soupçons de corruption qui s'accroissent au-dessus du Qatar depuis que le petit émirat a obtenu, à la surprise Générale, le 2 décembre 2010, l'organisation du Mondial 2022", 'Derrière le "Qatargate", la guerre Blatter-Platini', Le Monde

¹³⁵ "le Qatar est devenue la meilleure arme de Blatter", 'Derrière le "Qatargate", la guerre Blatter-Platini', Le Monde

¹³⁶ 'Ce « Qatargate » qui ébranle la FIFA', Le Monde

Disrespect of perceived “French traditions”

Qatar is portrayed as being an outsider actor in French domestic affairs. While the concept of ‘French values’ remains vague and is open to discussion, the arrival of Qatar in French daily affairs led to events which were perceived as diverging from traditional French ‘ways’ of managing situations. It also put lights on situations occurring in Qatar being judged by French newspapers through a French lens.

- Lists of ultras

Le Monde reported the existence of lists of supporters made by the club, which forbade them from entering the stadium.¹³⁷ While the title of the article already mentions the illegality of such decisions, the article develops on the arbitrary aspect of the decision.¹³⁸ The main reason for these supporters to be blacklisted as such is apparently to have criticised the Qatari administration of the club.¹³⁹ The fact that the administration of the club justifies this policy¹⁴⁰ makes this aspect reflect poorly on Qatar. While the administration of the club is entitled to decide who is allowed to enter the premises of the stadium, supporters were forbidden to do so because of political contestation which goes against the concept of free-speech.

- Club identity

The arrival of Qatari investors made the press wonder about the club identity. Indeed, discussions related to the potential transfer of the team to another stadium,¹⁴¹ the change of

¹³⁷ ‘La CNIL interdit au PSG le “fichage illégal” des ses supporters’, Le Monde

¹³⁸ “Le jour même, la Ligue des droits de l’homme (LDH) dénonçait dans un communiqué toute “exclusion arbitraire” de supporters”, ‘La CNIL interdit au PSG le “fichage illégal” de ses supporters’, Le Monde

¹³⁹ “le tort principal consiste simplement... à avoir contesté la politique actuelle des dirigeants parisiens”, ‘La CNIL interdit au PSG le “fichage illégal” de ses supporters’, Le Monde

¹⁴⁰ “On a le droit d’accueillir le public qu’on souhaite”, ‘La CNIL interdit au PSG le “fichage illégal” de ses supporters’, Le Monde

¹⁴¹ ‘Rachat du Parc des Princes: le PSG et la mairie de Paris démentent l’existence de négociations’, L’Équipe

logo, and the potential renaming of the club to put a more significant emphasis on the city of Paris in the club¹⁴² gave a negative image of the emirate.¹⁴³

While the situation with the club ultras and more traditional supporters saw an improvement between 2011 and 2017, as it is shown in a previous chapter of this research, the situation escalated between them and the Qatari administration.

The division between old supporters and the club is illustrated by a supporter quoted by *Le Monde* when he declares: *“I am disgusted by PSG. They fire Kombouaré. We are losing the Parc. We are breaking the Kop. We bought Beckham. It is not Paris, it is Disneyland”*.¹⁴⁴ This point was also mentioned when *Le Monde* reported the riots which occurred on the Trocadero square after PSG winning its domestic championship in 2013. *Le Monde* argued that *“hundreds of supporters deplore QSI’s temptation of getting rid of the club’s history.”*¹⁴⁵ In the same article, the reporter quotes a former president of a supporter association who argued that *“there is a complete absence of counter-forces, a loss of the values and soul of the club”*.¹⁴⁶

The problem concerning the supporters and the atmosphere within the stadium is also reflected in two articles from *Le Monde*.¹⁴⁷ The club is indeed presented as having ordered

¹⁴² ‘Paris sera toujours SG’, *L’Équipe*

¹⁴³ ‘Ligue 1: OL-PSG, le choc des modèles’, *Le Monde*

¹⁴⁴ “Je suis écoeuré par le PSG. Ils virent Kombouaré. On lâche le Parc. On case les Kop. On a acheté Beckham. C’est plus Paris, c’est Disneyland”, ‘Aux yeux de ses fidèles, le PSG a vendu son âme’, *Le Monde*

¹⁴⁵ “des centaines de supporters déplorent la tentation de QSI de s’affranchir de l’histoire du club”, ‘Derrière les incidents, la fronde des ultras contre les Qataris’, *Le Monde*

¹⁴⁶ “Il y a une absence totale de contre-pouvoirs, l’oubli des valeurs et de l’âme du club”, ‘Derrière les incidents, la fronde des ultras contre les Qataris’, *Le Monde*

¹⁴⁷ ‘PSG-Barcelone : le retour en douce des Ultras au Parc des Princes’, *Le Monde* and ‘PSG : le retour des ultras au Parc des Princes se concrétise’, *Le Monde*

supporters to bring a louder atmosphere in the stadium. While these aspects were done by the supporters directly before 2010, the club seems to be willing to force itself to be presented as a more active football entity during games. The administration is thus directly ordering accredited supporters to bring a new ambience in the Parc des Princes rather than creating incentives for supporters to do so. The administration of the club thus creates a feeling of an artificial, or at least forced, new identity of the club. The objective seems to restore the positive parts of the past of the club and to add it to the elements brought with the new administration since 2011 to create a modern and fashionable identity of the club.

Conclusion: The Limits of State Branding

The results of Qatar's investments in France through PSG are complex when looked through the lens of state branding. The financial and sporting development of PSG has to be acknowledged. The involvement of Qatar in the process is therefore successful in this aspect. Based on the logic mentioned in the methodology section of this paper, the state branding of Qatar should be considered as successful. The author of this research paper indeed mentioned a positive correlation between the development of the company branding of PSG and the state branding of Qatar in the methodology section of this paper. The logic behind this correlation was as follow: since the football club was wholly owned by a subpart of Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, QSI, and the purchase of the club was entirely driven by the state branding strategy of Qatar (Thani and Heenan 1019), the successful branding of PSG would imply the successful state branding of Qatar. The opposite would also then apply with a negative branding of PSG leading to a negative state branding of Qatar. This model would make PSG merely a tool of Qatar's sports diplomacy.

However, the results of this research show the limits of this model. While PSG was fortunate in the development of its brand, it did not lead to a clear positive state branding of Qatar in France. The positive economic development of PSG did not lead to a certain positive

development of the perception of Qatar in France. While being based on the model previously mentioned, the research showed that branding was not necessarily related to the economic results of an entity. Instead, as it is developed by Dinnie, branding, be it company- or state-centred, is concerned with the perception of how promises, which are advertised, are respected (16). For PSG, the success of the branding of the club and Qatar is dependent on several aspects. Firstly, by purchasing and investing in PSG, Qatar brought attention to itself and saw French media paying more attention to the internal characteristics of the emirate. Secondly, by using the only major football club in Paris and the surrounding region, the success of Qatar's state branding is depended on local factors. The five years before the purchase of the club by QSI saw different groups of supporters indeed fight each other on what appeared to be political motives.¹⁴⁸ The results of the research on the perception of Qatar through the lens of PSG in the two newspapers *Le Monde* and *L'Équipe* were characterised by these two main aspects.

Qatar was successful in its branding in France on at least three topics. The French press through *Le Monde* and *L'Équipe* portrayed both PSG and Qatar as successful on the symbolic value of the acquisition of the club, the acquisition of specific leading figures such as David Beckham and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, and the progressive reintegration of ultras and historic supporters within the stadium and therefore in the daily life of the club. Like this final point, which illustrates a sign of progress in the perception of the club and its Qatari administration, the acquisition of the club by QSI led to interrogations within French politics on the nature and the objectives of Qatar by doing so. However, the public behaviour of certain personalities related to the club, such as Nasser Al-Khelaïfi and Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, gave the acquisition of the club a positive image and showed the willingness of Qatar to adapt to French living traditions or habits. While Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani was responsible for the purchase of the club when he was not yet the Emir of Qatar, he continued being implicated in the

¹⁴⁸ 'Au Parc Des Princes, Les Tribunes De La Haine Du PSG', *Le Monde*

perception of the club and its daily life. It was made clear in an article from L'Équipe which mentioned how the emir invited the presidents of the other clubs of the Ligue 1 to the tennis tournament Roland Garros.¹⁴⁹ However, Nasser Al-Khelaïfi remained the Qatari public figure associated with the club. While Qatar had been associated by specific political figures such as Bruno Le Maire and François Fillon,¹⁵⁰ the president of PSG took part in the commemoration walk after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, next to heads of states and governments.¹⁵¹ The purchase of specific football figures such as David Beckham and Zlatan Ibrahimović also helped Qatar to benefit from a positive image in France. While Ibrahimović headlined because of numerous controversial public declarations, the acquisition of such figures for the club helped Qatar to be portrayed as a sincere actor willing to spend as much as needed to develop the brand and team of PSG.

Nevertheless, the arrival of Qatar in PSG, and therefore also in France's domestic affairs, led to the negative portrayal of the emirate. The first aspect is directly related to state branding strategy: communication. The administration was indeed not able to handle certain internal affairs to the club which led to a negative coverage of the club by Le Monde and L'Équipe. The predominant example remains the 'Aurier Affair' in which a player insulted his trainer and several players. While it gave a negative perception of the club, the fact that the administration let the player play and represent the team during a crucial game for the club in the Champions League showed that the club was not willing to stand up for itself. Another significant aspect which led to a negative coverage of the club was the apparent lack of Fair-play. This topic should be divided into two subtopics: a lack of fair play in domestic competitions and a lack of respect for the Financial Fair Play implemented by the UEFA. The

¹⁴⁹ 'L'émir du Qatar reçoit la L1 à Roland-Garros', L'Équipe

¹⁵⁰ 'Fillon et Le Maire ciblent le Qatar, accusé de financer le terrorisme', Le Monde

¹⁵¹ 'Al-Khelaïfi a participé à la manifestation à Paris', L'Équipe

sporting success of the club in domestic competitions led to a negative coverage and to interrogations concerning the relative benefits for France to have such a club. The struggles between the club and the UEFA concerning the Financial Fair Play also negatively impacted the image of Qatar in France. Le Monde reported on how the questions of Qatar self-sponsoring its club through its tourism authority represented a violation of the Financial Fair Play. This last point relates to two other aspects which had unfavourable repercussions on the portrayal of Qatar in France. The involvement of Qatar in French affairs led to media looking more closely at the domestic situation of Qatar. Le Monde and L'Équipe looked at how the emirate was treating its foreign workers and football players and reported negatively about these two aspects. The last aspect concerning the apparently failed state branding of Qatar in France concerning the corruption-related topics of the attribution of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to the emirate and the struggle between Blatter and Platini for the head of the football organisation. In both cases, Qatar is not depicted as the main antagonist but is still presented as an actor willing to pressure or bribe pivotal actors to obtain its deed.

Qatar's state branding in France cannot be considered as entirely successful based on these findings. However, as Dinnie outlined, there is no precise definition of state branding since the concept appears to be recent in academic research (13). If one takes the aspect related to state branding which consists of making people aware of the country, then Qatar has been successful. However, when looking at the definition which consists of giving the country a more attractive image abroad, then Qatar has failed to do so in France with PSG. One question which can be asked based on these findings is whether France was the audience Qatar tried to reach to with investing in PSG. The Times indeed pretended not to know that there was a football club in Paris before the arrival of Qatari investors,¹⁵² whereas PSG was already a well-established brand in France before 2011. Future research could be made concerning the

¹⁵² 'Paris est magique', Le Monde

development of the image of PSG abroad, either on a European level since the club competes in European competitions or on a global level since PSG became a global brand since the arrival of several key players such as Beckham and Ibrahimović. Based on the same model linking company branding with state branding, Qatar's state branding through PSG could be considered as successful if the club is portrayed positively by media in different countries. The question of the audience which a state hopes to reach is not developed extensively in the literature. It is indeed assumed that the targeted audience is the one from the host country whereas the impacts of the developments of an actor in a particular country might lead to a change of perception of this actor in another country. Therefore, the case of PSG in the context of Qatar's state branding remains relevant for future research.

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