

SPORT AND NATION BRANDING: THE SOFT POWER AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OF FOOTBALL IN CAMEROON

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dr. Kenfack FRIDOLIN

Ministry of External Relations of Cameroon

fridolin.kkaf.82@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-4401-2869

Gönderim Tarihi: 27.09.2022 Kabul Tarihi: 09.12.2022

Alıntı: FRİDOLİN, K. (2022). Sport And Nation Branding: The Soft Power And Public Diplomacy of Football In Cameroon. *Akdeniz Havzası ve Afrika Medeniyetleri Dergisi*, 4(2), 83-99.

DOI: 10.54132/akaf.1180648

ABSTRACT: Since the end of the Cold war, the world and international relations as well, have witnessed several mutations and transformations. These changes occurred both in the nature and the conceptual approach of international politics. This can be seen with the changing nature of actors, power, and diplomacy illustrated through soft power or new concepts like public diplomacy. In this new environment culture, entertainment and sport can be of great importance. Sports can create public interest and public goodwill, and appeal directly to the public, to provide a favorable environment for a nation to manage its international relations. Though rarely a sufficient condition for diplomacy, sport can be effective in facilitating changes or increasing momentum in diplomatic practices and sympathy. In this perspective sport as a soft power tool and public diplomacy are interrelated since they nourished each other. In the present paper, by focusing on sport mainly football as a prospective tool of public diplomacy and soft power in Cameroon, we aim to demonstrate how sport can put a country in the spotlight and showcase all it has to offer, and thus produce an effect in selling nation's brand in a harmonious dialogue among national and foreign public opinion. The organization of the last Africa Cup of Nations by Cameroon, between January and February 2022 precisely, contributes to illustrating in the eyes of the world the place that sport and football, in particular, can play in the history of this country.

Keywords: public diplomacy; soft power; Cameroon's foreign policy; sport; football.

Spor Ve Ulus Markası: Kamerun'da Futbolun Yumuşak Gücü Ve Kamu Diplomasisi

ÖZ: Soğuk Savaşın bitiminden bu yana dünya ve hatta uluslararası ilişkiler, birçok değişime ve dönüşüme tanıklık etmiştir. Bu değişiklikler, uluslararası politikanın oyuncularını, iktidarın değişkenlik gösteren tabiatını (yumuşak güç kavramıyla) veya şimdilerde kamu diplomasisi olarak bilinen yeni alternatifle birlikte diplomasi kavramını etkileyen uluslararası politikanın hem doğasında hem de kavramsal yaklaşımında cereyan etmiştir. Bu yeni ortamda kültür, eğlence ve sporun önemi artmaktadır. Spor, kamusal bir ilgi ve itibar yaratabildiği ve doğrudan halka hitap edebildiği için, ulusun uluslararası ilişkilerini yönetmesine elverişli bir ortam sağlamaktadır. Diplomasi için kendi içinde nadiren yeterli bir durum olmasına rağmen spor, diplomatik uygulamalarda ve duygudaşıklıkta değişikliklerin hızlandırılması veya ivmenin artırılmasında etkili rol oynayabilir. Bu açıdan, yumuşak güç aracı olarak spor ve kamu diplomasisi birbirleriyle ilişkilidir çünkü birbirlerini beslerler. Bu çalışmada Kamerun'da spora, özellikle de futbola, kamu diplomasisi ve yumuşak gücün geleceğe yönelik bir aracı olarak odaklanarak amacımız, sporun bir ülkede nasıl dikkat çekebileceğini, ülkenin elindeki her şeyi nasıl ortaya koyabileceğini ve bu suretle de yerli ve yabancı kamuoyunda bir ulusun markasının uyumlu bir iletişim içinde satılmasına nasıl etki edebileceğini göstermektir. Son Afrika Uluslar Kupası'nın Kamerun tarafından Ocak ve Şubat 2022 arasında düzenlenmesi, dünyanın gözünde özellikle sporun ve özellikle futbolun bu ülkenin tarihindeki yerini göstermeye katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: kamu diplomasi; yumuşak güç; Kamerun dış politikası; Spor; Futbol

Introduction

In international politics, it is obvious and generally recognized that no country can handle a foreign policy above its capacities. This is another way to emphasize the fundamental link between a country's external projection and its existing potential. But this should not lead to a reductionism of geopolitical or geographic determinism in international relations and foreign policy, even though there are mutual influences as Napoleon liked to underscore that a country has no (foreign) policy but that of its geography¹. A country such as Cameroon can't pretend to conduct its foreign policy the same as major powers such as America (Charillon & De Hoop Scheffer, 2006), Russia, or even a growing major power like China.

The above assertions also well correlate with the end of the Cold war and the changing nature of international relations at large and the modes of diplomacy specifically. Traditionally defined as an interstate

¹ Napoleon Bonaparte was a french emperor, general, statesman, and military (1769-1821).

exchange game involving mostly if not only public spheres and actors, diplomacy has earned new dimensions with the fallen bipolarity world. The post-Cold war era is made up of the flourishing of non-state actors in world politics as well as new forms of diplomacy such as public diplomacy. It is also the era of the shifting nature of power in international affairs as underlined through Joseph Nye's concept of soft power (Nye, 2002). Last and not least, this period opens a new gate and opportunities to state actors once considered under the bipolarity as irrelevant or second class players of the world politics (Batistella, 1993: 749).

As a matter of consequences in line with the said transformations, a country from central Africa such as Cameroon is naturally affected and then manages to adapt its institutions in this changing context. Joseph Nye's works, as we know, are innovative in that it highlights the circulation of cultural power in International Relations. Through its soft power, the author draws attention to the need to pay more credit to the dissemination of the ways of thinking, representations, and perceptions specific to a group or a nation. And especially the attractiveness that can result. Public diplomacy thus proves to be a privileged channel of diffusion and acceleration of soft power, offering nations apparent or virtual sophisticated mechanisms to influence or directly impact the foreign public and opinions. Hence, sports as well as the various arts are essential components of this cultural power at work. It is in this sense that sport and football quickly become markers of the international existence of Cameroon in post-bipolarity. And, if the end of the Cold War, staged the search for meaning in a globally changing world with nations long reduced to the rank of the object or at best, the rank of second-zone actors of the international arena, a country like Cameroon will find precisely through the example of football, an unexpected vehicle of diffusion and self-construction in this international playground, making it a decisive channel for its public diplomacy.

Therefore, the present article aims to outline the changing nature of the diplomacy paradigm. The case study of football helps to emphasize here how a developing country like Cameroon succeeds to involve public diplomacy and soft power as key tools of its foreign policy for international branding and recognition. Furthermore, with football, I intend to explain how sport can shift from mere entertainment and the private sphere to a political tool of communication to foreign opinions, the public, and the world arena in general. Our analysis thus will provide an answer to how public diplomacy, soft power, and sport relate to each other in international relations. How much do public diplomacy and the soft power of football affect Cameroon's foreign policy? In a more specific way, our analysis points out the increased relevance attached to the sport as an alternative tool of foreign policy. In connection with Easton's political system analysis (Easton, 1953), the current article also underlines that the international sport system is part of an international political system, which of course is part of international relations at large. Therefore, both systems reciprocally influence each other (Kobierecki, 2013: 50) and advocate the fact that in modern times sports and football are viewed by states as powerful tools for (public) diplomacy and soft power.

Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, And Sport In International Relations: Conceptual Analysis And Background Studies

Public diplomacy

There is no doubt about the fact that the public diplomacy concept has developed nowadays thanks to globalization and new technologies of information and communication (Şahin and Çevik, 2015: 5). Truly speaking, public diplomacy is nothing new. Public diplomacy has a long history as a means of promoting a country's soft power, namely during the Cold War periods. Public diplomacy is an advertising strategy. This concept may have been used for a long time but under a different spelling. And if the word was first used by Time Magazine in the early 1900s, it is only in 1965 that Edmund Gullion a former US diplomat provided a modern conceptual approach to public diplomacy (Şahin and Çevik, 2015: 6).

Therefore a distinction should be established between what is considered traditional public diplomacy and the new public diplomacy since there is no definitional consensus over the term².

On the one hand, it is considered that diplomacy has moved forward from state to state formula, to a state-to-foreign public, and then from a monologue statute to two-way public diplomacy (Seib, 2009). Thus, from the Cold War period till 9/11, we have traditional public diplomacy which is unidirectional

² CPD, "Defining Public Diplomacy", <https://www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org/page/what-is-pd>, accessed on 20/08/2019.

oriented diplomacy from a given state towards the population or public opinion of another foreign state (Şahin and Çevik, 2015: 6). Hence César Garcia underlined that: “Public diplomacy has traditionally been defined as one way communication whereby one nation uses image cultivation to build a favorable image with publics who live in another country” (Garcia, 2012: 115). Thinking to Philip Seib, this version of public diplomacy is portrayed, as a strategy “reaching out directly to foreign publics rather than the foreign government” (Seib, 2009).

On the other hand, regarding what is viewed as new public diplomacy, Joseph Nye explains that: “Effective public diplomacy is a two-way street that involves listening as well as talking. We need to understand better what is going on in the minds of others and what values we share. That is why exchanges are often more effective than mere broadcasting [...] It is crucial to understand the target audience. In fact, “research on foreign public opinion” is still poorly addressed in the two-way approach option (Nye, 2008: 103). It is the same analysis as John Robert Kelly underlines that public diplomacy has moved from monologue to dialogue (Kelley, 2007). Therefore, Public diplomacy stresses the changing nature of diplomatic practice in the communication age as well as soft power calls one’s attention to the changing nature of power with the end of the Cold war. Furthermore, considering that we also have bilateral diplomacy and multilateral in the words of Jan Melissen, public diplomacy is a two-way dimension linking national opinion and foreign one (Melissen, 2011). For instance, William Rugh noticed that the difficulty for authoritarian governments lies in persuading foreign publics of something that their domestic public may not believe. That is why post 9/11 public diplomacy is a two ways diplomacy because it is a talk oriented towards foreign public opinions in connection with our own national opinion, since only topics of national consensus on the meaning and self-perception, can then be easily exportable as ways of thinking and representing specific to a community and externalized as such.

So, although the state acts in public diplomacy as a traditional actor, from now citizens, as well as non-state actors, are more often looked at as public diplomacy resources. To carry out a specific communication skill, the state also looks for legitimacy and strong support for their actions, this may come only from their internal public opinion. For that reason, there is no cleaving wall between a state's internal policy and the foreign one, since in a democratic system, without the strong support of the national opinion, a state could not successfully apply a foreign policy of its only selfish choices. Likewise, this also explains the reason why terrorist group activities' main target is the national opinion in democratic countries, the same as the pressure of the American national opinion that led to the country’s withdrawal from the Viet Nam war. We then conclude with Ellen Huijgh that “internal legitimacy remains a precondition for international” achievements and recognition, and thus for the efficiency of the new public diplomacy. That is the key word for a better understanding of the “two-way street” concept of the new public diplomacy approach. Therefore countries “risk failing to determine the proper formula for efficiently reaching out on foreign policy to foreign publics abroad if they bypass their citizens” (Huijgh, 2012: 64). This is quite a good example of the transformation of the international stage with its domestic corollary.

Still, apart from the epistemological or heuristic perspective and research interests, the distinction between a traditional and new approach of public diplomacy that is found in the frontline between the “post-Cold war public diplomacy” and the new 21st-century one should not be overstressed. Although literature acknowledges such a distinction, it does not particularly entail a shift in this area of study since the theoretical plea in favor of “a new or 21st century public diplomacy has rather highlighted the need to rework more traditional views of public diplomacy’s core components in reaction to an evolving environment” (Huijgh, 2012: 64).

So, from the above analysis, let’s look at public diplomacy in Bruce Gregory and Jan Melissen’s sense as “an instrument used by states, associations of states, sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships, and influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values” (Melissen 2011: 2). As clearly metaphorically stated by Melissen, we have entered the era of democratization of diplomacy, with the eruption of the plurality and the multitude in a field that was once the privilege of a restricted group of actors. And with this concept of public diplomacy, diplomacy is “no longer a stiff waltz among states alone” as governments “realized that developing their country’s overseas/out boundaries attractiveness requires reaching out to transnational civil society” (Melissen op. cit.). The present day’s public diplomacy just reminds the different actors that listening to ‘the other is a cornerstone principle (Melissen, 2011: 10).

To that effect, this paper in hand is a combination of both traditional and new approaches to public diplomacy. The traditional analysis of public diplomacy thus invites us to keep a close eye on the preponderant role of the state in the management of Cameroonian football, both through the formal and informal arbitrations of the Presidency of the Republic and through the statutory tutelage, which falls within the Ministry of sports in the matter. Indeed, it is the observation that emerges and that we can easily see in the dialectic of these actors vis-à-vis the senior national football flag team the “Indomitable Lions” of Cameroon. Whereas the new approach is also central here as the civil society backing and the individual undertakings and performances of Cameroonian football players abroad are quickly assimilated with state image and brand.

There is a more prominent part played by Cameroonian civil society in shaping national football through both support and criticism inputs. Moreover, this is quite similar to a mode of political communication through sports and precisely football. Therefore, we can consider that, this state-society interaction as well as the projection of images abroad, responds to feedback, both from the state and foreign public opinion regarding the image conveyed by the said football at a time T, mainly the first national team; thus closing the loop of the two-way public diplomacy of Cameroonian football. Whatsoever, the reciprocal and interdependent interaction between public diplomacy’s external and domestic features is becoming clearer in today’s social media landscape. That is why a prospective analysis through a holistic approach sounds better to us. This best emphasizes how much the system is structured around a bijective transaction between state and society in molding public diplomacy, serving to address foreign audiences and shape their opinions to increase a state’s international influence, attractiveness and recognition. And thus, giving a decisive impetus to implementing its foreign policy goals (Ushkovska and Petrushevska, 2015: 90).

In a more specific way as stated by Joseph Nye “public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries, rather than merely their governments”, and a medium to diffuse, to spread soft power (Nye, 2008: 95). This, therefore, makes soft power a content, a substance being diffused by different means such as public diplomacy as referring to the branding of football in Cameroon.

Soft power

The concept of “soft power” was first elaborated by American professor Joseph Junior Nye in a book printed in 1990 and two academic papers published the same year. Based on the idea of the ‘non/less fungibility’³ of the (hard) power along with the collapse of the Soviet Union following the end of the Cold War and the imperative of seizing the nature of the power in the changing environment of global politics, Nye’s concept was built on a vision argued earlier by two other scholars whilst talking about “the second face of power” (Rugh, 2009: 3). The less fungibility here refers to the less transferability of power “from sphere to sphere” in the present fragmented global politics dominated by a plurality of arenas and fields (Nye, 1990: 159). Therefore, a state’s power can no longer be perceived only in terms of military or economic capacities. Beyond hard power, one should have an attentive look at the soft one. Soft power focuses on the changing nature of power in world politics, the same as Joseph Nye substantially refined his concept in post 9/11 via rich and abundant literature (Rugh, 2009: 3).

Be it like weather or like love as the author usually compares it (Nye, 2004: 1), power is “the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcome one wants” (Nye, 2004: 2). And still, as Nye recognizes himself, there are various ways to affect the conduct of others. Thus, soft power is only one of those ways and even one of the most operational and efficient in the 21st century’s world politics since it may cost less. Soft power or “co-option power” is “the ability to shape the preferences of others” (Nye, 2004: 5). It is the ability to affect others to obtain what one wants through attraction and seduction, particularly through one nation’s culture, political values, domestic and foreign policies, rather than coercion or payment (Rugh, 2009: 4).

“Soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want”, therefore this all depends on the quality of the message sent, and how it is processed and integrated by the recipient (Nye, 2004: 103). To Nye, resources that produce soft power are of three orders: a country’s policies, values, and cultures. Within the culture resides entertainment at large as well as sport-based activities. He considers

³ See Susan Strange research on fungible power in international politics.

that popular culture (namely mass entertainment), to which popular sports are easily assimilated, aims to entertain the public and seduce their mind as well. It plays an important part in communicating values and is a source of cultural soft power. In a bridging analysis of soft power and public diplomacy, the famous American scholar emphasized that: "But if the content of a country's culture, values, and policies are not attractive, public diplomacy that "broadcasts" them cannot produce soft power. It may produce just the opposite" (Nye, 2004: 95). While soft power is a substance or merely a resource, public diplomacy is only but a way, an instrument, a medium, to spread and diffuse that soft power. In other words, it is easy to understand that soft power can also exist outside and independently of public diplomacy. But the fusion of the two generates a powerful projection tool, thus shaping and reshaping the image and the perception of a group or a nation abroad.

Though, classical literature on soft power always focuses on the major powers. By bringing to light a case study on Qatar, Osman Antwi-Boateng then emphasized the soft power of small countries (Antwi-Boateng, 2013). Still, this case study may appear exceptional since, despite the country's small size, its financial and economic capacities are closer to western developed countries. Therefore, one of the main interests of this paper is to spotlight the soft power of a developing country like Cameroon with less financial and economic means as well as less networking regarding the structure of global politics. Thus, the focus on Cameroon offers a departure from great power exercising any form of power and demonstrates how a developing country can punch above its weight by exerting soft power influence and shaping proper perspectives from Africa to the world at large through the channel of sport football.

Sport

Some approaches see the sport through the contrast of recreational or leisure sports (amateur sport) on the one hand, and high-performance or elite sports (professional sport) on the other hand (Kobiecki, 2013: 50). But in general, discussing sports be it "sport" like in Britain, or "sports" like in the U.S, refers to "all forms of usually competitive physical activities or games aiming to use, maintain or improve physical abilities and skills of people" (Boyacıoğlu and Oğuz, 2016). Furthermore, the Britannica Encyclopedia describes sport as "competitive and entertaining activities that require a certain degree of strength and skill". Sport, whether individual or collective, naturally appears as an integrative activity that transforms the environment of people, by inserting them into a community focused on issues of competitiveness or self-fulfillment and well-being under established rules (Boyacıoğlu and Oğuz, 2016: 100). Nevertheless, our analysis is not that much interested in further developments over the dichotomy leisure/elite sports. Though special mention will be paid here to professional sports, mainly professional football also identified as "soccer" in other countries such as the U.S.

We consider that any distinction in terms of amateur and professional sports is not relevant because there is no professional sport by nature. Every sport is at first amateur and can then turn professional providing it attracts interest and financial investments. In Cameroon, the football national championship is professional since 2014 but still faces strong financial challenges as well as a lack of infrastructure. While the footballers who have helped to build the image of Cameroon abroad as well as the legend of the national team of "Indomitable Lions" since the 1970s and 1980s, played mostly in a national championships still amateur at that time.

So nowadays, having most Cameroonian players under a professional status both inside and outside the country can facilitate to a certain extent the analysis by giving more consistency to our research's object. But we shouldn't lose sight that it has not always been the case; in the same vein, the consideration that sport has always enjoyed in international relations may be subject to debate.

Sport and international relations: Background studies

It is well-known and acknowledged that sport can play an important part in soft power diplomacy as it can be a source of cultural soft power. Thus, regardless of the form, it is argued that sport works softly and deeply as a diplomatic lubricant. Sports can create public interest and public goodwill, and appeal directly to the general public, to provide a favorable environment for a nation to manage its international image and projection. As said by Thierry Zint: "Though rarely itself a sufficient condition for diplomacy, sport can be effective in facilitating changes or increasing momentum in diplomatic practices" (Zintz, 2016).

As we adopt Braudel's *longue durée* analysis concept to elaborate, it then appears that the linkage between sport and international politics is not that new. The juxtaposition of a plurality of social temporalities is at the very heart of the implementation of Braudel's theory of the "*longue durée*", which then provides the analysis with a deeper background narrative. Based on that ground, let's simply apprehend the idea of *longue durée* as referring to periods distant from the present or periods, we usually conceive of as extended (Grote, 2015: 6). The "time of the long-term structure of social reality" is then obviously privileged here "over the time of events" which is merely dust to Braudel (Lee, 2012: 2). To put it differently, sporting in international relations cannot be seized through recent selective most prominent events only. The sport was already an active tool of international politics among city-states and nations (or a factor of emulation and rivalries) as from Roman Empire or Greek antiquity.

The nexus between sport and international relations have always been complex both yesterday as much as today, mainly during the Cold war and the ongoing post-Cold war times.

Sport and international relations: A historical perspective and Cold war effect

Although Kobierecki is considered a sport a modern-time phenomenon (Kobierecki, 2013: 49), it should be remembered that fundamentally sports are not something new, even their use in connection either with war or peace among nations or cities and states. As we pay a look to the memory of "Gods of Arena" in ancient Greece or the Gladiator in Roman Empire⁴, it just reveals how rooted sport can be in world history. But what might be new is the massive impact of modern sport in the international sphere in selling nations' branding and values, as well as the relevance of sports fans and the business network generated. Of course, sports rules considerably transformed from ancient Greece hitherto. And more than mere entertainment, the sport could be seen as a peaceful war. Nations and city-states could challenge each other and express their pride without bloodshed. This thus contributed to playing sports as a way of civilizing human values and sublimating the violence of people and nations (Elias and Dunning, 1986 [2008]; Dunning, 1999). It is then considered that there would exist an international sports law, the same as the law of nations, promoted through a sort of *jus cogens* based on the idea of "fair play".

In modern times the nexus between diplomacy and sport can be termed to have started with the 1908 London Olympics, with the famous Franco-British exhibition during the event of which the Olympics formed a part. Throughout memories, this illustrated clearly the diplomatic value attributed to trading relations with mainland Europe and the utilization of sport to celebrate the "Entente Cordiale" agreement signed four years ago by France and the United Kingdom (Beacom, 2000: 15). Still, because of its amateur structural organization, the sport was not that much spread worldwide, making its significance for international relations somewhat marginal. It is during the second half of the twentieth century and thanks to a deep reshuffle of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) that international sport entered a new dimension and perspectives (Kobierecki, 2013: 51).

Nevertheless, there is literature that believes that sport and (inter)national politics should not mix⁵. But for sure they do. And a good example of that is given through Nazism and fascism period as well as the Cold war era. What this view seems to ignore is the long-term structural relationship that exists between sports and political agencies at the local, regional, and international levels⁶. And whatever is written in the Olympic Charter in terms of prohibition, it doesn't mean that sport should not mix with politics. Merely the meaning of this is that the Olympic Charter stands against the use of sport for political purposes (IOC, 2019: 16). Hence the two can go together in sharing sports values of "fair play, tolerance, diversity, integration..."

In a book first published in 1998 Parnaud and J. Riordan underlined the international role played by sport during the Fascist and Nazi periods. Beyond a negligible aspect of gaming and entertainment, the sport was then an instrument to evaluate and weigh rivalries among states (Parnaud and Riordan (ed.),

⁴ <http://www.crystalinks.com/romesports.html> and <http://www.primaryhomeworkhelp.co.uk/greece/sports.htm>, retrieved on December 28/12/2017.

⁵ "Should Sports and Politics always Mix?" online <https://sportdiplomacy.wordpress.com/2012/09/11/should-sports-and-politics-always-mix/> accessed on 11/15/2016.

⁶ Nowadays not only do sports and politics mix but furthermore, they establish specific cooperation among them as the collaboration between the UN and IOC in the same perspective: On a symbolic note, the UN flag now flies at all competition sites of the Olympic Games.

2003). It is largely known that Benito Mussolini used the 1934 FIFA World Cup, which was held in Italy, to showcase Fascist Italy. While Adolf Hitler also used the 1936 Summer Olympics held in Berlin and the Winter Olympics held the same year in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, to promote the Nazi ideology of the superiority of the Aryan race to any other (Boyacıoğlu and Oğuz, 2016: 102). The same conception and perception of sport and politics will follow and even gain further momentum during Cold war times.

In the 1970s at the very height of the Cold war, the so-called famous 'ping-pong diplomacy' was used to reduce tension between China and US (McLellan, 2016; Qingmin, 2013). More often sport has been used to send a political message. Examples can be seen in the boycott of teams from countries that failed to condemn South Africa's apartheid, or the US boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow in a sign of protest against Soviet troops entering Afghanistan. Also, we have the retaliatory boycott of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles by the Soviet Union four years later (Ushkovska and Petrushevskaya, 2015: 90). The East-West rivalry during the Cold war is therefore also a good example. This rivalry could be termed being focused on technology and military aspects, of course also consisting of competition, culture, literature, art, and sports. As a consequence of that, the victories and success between the two poles in international sports events were perceived as the success of their ideological system and technology. All these and similar actions show that the political conflict of the Cold war had penetrated deep into the sporting fields.

Sport and international relations in present times: A post bipolarity perspective analysis

With the end of the Cold war, despite the fall of ideology in international politics, rivalries among states to host sport international big events have not dropped. Instead, it has gained more intensity. It is all about national branding, business opportunity, development, and selling one's culture and know-how. For emergent countries, hosting such events is perfect proof that they achieved a substantial step in their development process and therefore deserve better consideration in world affairs and politics than before.

A good example is given when Japan and Korea hosted the FIFA world cup in 2002. This event brought the two states not only to cooperate but to also increase the trust level among them while in the past their relations were so harsh regarding their common history and colonization matter (Manzenreiter, 2008). Along the same line, the vote in favor of Australia for the hosting of the 2000 Summer Olympics rather than China, was seen as revitalizing the Samuel Huntington theory of the Clash of Civilizations as Australia succeeded thanks to the backing of western countries in the last round (Beacom, 2000: 15). While African countries and Asian ones supported China.

International sporting 'mega-events' put a country in the spotlight and showcase all it has to offer. That is why despite the country facing an economic crisis and knowing that it was going to increase the national debt, still Greece struggled to host the 2004 Olympic Games (Nauright, 2013: 25).

After it failed in 2000, China finally succeeded as the host state of the 2008 Summer Olympics. The Beijing's Olympiad recalled how sport and politics are increasingly becoming tangled together as the opening ceremony gathered 54 heads of state and 10 royal dignitaries. "More than 100 meetings were set up between Chinese officials and leaders from other countries. Therefore, the event can be described as a grand diplomatic ceremony" (Qingmin, 2013). The attribution of the FIFA world cup to South Africa in 2010 or the 2014 edition to Brazil as well as the 2016 Olympics, is proof of the shifting process of power in international politics⁷. And despite the critics related to the attribution of the 2018 FIFA football world cup to Russia and the 2022 edition to Qatar (Antwi-Boateng, 2013: 45), one can easily notice that world big sports events are no more the sole privilege of Western countries and their allies as it has always been the case up to the beginning of the 21st century. One could argue that Western European countries, the US, Canada, and other pro-Western countries such as South Korea and Japan, are no longer in a position to dictate who has the right to organize a competition and who does not. Indeed, their legitimacy is eroding as new powers emerge in another part of the world. Following these geopolitical trends, big sports events should move to a place outside the traditional power sphere and open themselves to new countries. In other words, new regional leaders in Asia, South America, Africa, and the Arab world should and will set up more international competition soon.

⁷ Even though it is still viewed as the field of Low Politics as compared to the High Power still largely under the control of the major power state.

Hosting international sports mega-events has turned out to be crucial in an environment that has become democratized and where the traditional powers are now facing challenges in making their speech and their vision triumph. The FIFA gate that sparked in 2015, is very illustrative of this situation. This is undoubtedly one of the biggest scandals of all time to hit this great football institution. Out of alleged money laundering, fraud, and use of bribery, several leaders will be jailed while others are banned for life from the football milieu (Blake, 2015). As for President Sepp Blatter, who headed FIFA since 1998, he will be forced to resign in June 2015, just a few days after his triumphant election for a fifth term. A very astonishing paradox. How to analyze such an upheaval? Apart from a few other cases that could have been already pending, we must go back to 2010 and the attributions of the 2018 and 2022 football world cups which hovered great suspicions of corruption. And if we add here the failure of the US bid against actors that might be considered of lesser importance (Russia, Qatar), we quickly understand why it is the all-powerful US justice through his FBI who struck a strong kick in the anthill, thus triggering this massive, unprecedented scandal in the world of football. As Paul Blake underscores, it is always well believed that the US pays less attention to football (soccer); so "why is it leading the charge against alleged FIFA corruption?" Their involvement at the forefront in fighting alleged corruption and the crucial part played by the FBI said it all on the power of attraction of the "world's beautiful game" (Blake, 2015). As a direct aftermath of this upheaval, the newly established FIFA's post-scandal staff's major decision was to attribute the 2026 football World Cup hosting to the US; and this speaks volumes.

As such, Sports and mainly football here can be an element of dialogue with partner countries. Football can be used as a tool to project a state's image to the rest of the world. It can build stronger relationships with other states as well as a rising factor of positive rivalries and sane emulation.

As underlined in the concept's clarification, public diplomacy of sport does serve as a tool or instrument to achieve the expected goals in diplomacy. According to Sebastian McLellan, sports diplomacy refers to two specific realities. On the one hand, "it is the intentional appropriation of the sport by the government as a tool for conducting international diplomacy". On the other hand, "it is the broader webs of interaction that build up around international sporting events between government, NGOs, business, media, civil society and, of course, teams and sporting bodies themselves" (McLellan, 2016). Both approaches will be prioritized in this paper. Merging football, public diplomacy and soft power give a surprising face to Cameroon, through which this developing country of Central Africa appears as a pivot of the new codes of world diplomacy.

Public Diplomacy And Soft Power Of Football In Cameroon's Foreign Image

It is a truism to say that any research (in social sciences) is primarily indicative of the researcher's curiosity and interest in each issue. Among other considerations, it is after having some discussions with Pr Mehmet Emin Çağırın my Ph. D supervisor at the Gazi University in the city of Ankara in Turkey that I resolved to write this article on soft power and the public diplomacy of football in Cameroon. From our first contact, he told me all the pleasure that he and some of his companions, while being students in France, had to see the Cameroon football team performing during the 1990 World Cup in Italy. He would always recount the exploits of this squad and the forward Roger Milla, one of the star players, who scored four goals during this competition.

In many circumstances and even while walking in the street in Turkey or other countries, it is not uncommon to see people practically 30 years later continue to assimilate the image of Cameroon to that of Milla, or more recently that of a certain Samuel Eto'o Fils. This anecdote of young Turks enrolled in a master's degree in international law in France could be duplicated in many other countries and, it shows above all how through entertainment and a mere game, the Cameroon team could print the image of this young nation on the international scene. Since then, this image has been constantly polished throughout international competitions. In Cameroon, football has thus become a niche of soft power, and a lever for public and societal communication both nationally and internationally, nurturing international notoriety and attractiveness, as well as its singularity among the world's major football states. And just as the Center on Public Diplomacy puts it: "This new diplomacy will not in the short term displace traditional state-to-state diplomacy as practiced by foreign ministries, but it will impact the way"⁸ nations communicate and settle their image and perception abroad.

⁸ CPD, "Defining Public Diplomacy" *op. cit.*

History and Background Analysis of football in Cameroon

The history of football in Cameroon goes together with the country's institutional and political life. It is as from 1920 as the country is still under French administration and thanks to two foreigners that football entered Cameroon: one was the primary school teacher Charles Lalanne⁹, and the other is a photographer and same-time trade agent from Sierra Leone, George Goethe. In 1924 Goethe created one of the first-ever football teams in Cameroon the so-called "Club Athlétique du Cameroun" (Cameroon's Athletic Club). And very soon this example will be followed by many other new teams. The Cameroonian Football Federations Association (FECAFOOT) is created in 1959 and affiliated with FIFA in 1962 and the African Football Confederation (CAF) in 1963. Whereas the Cameroon national football team will come into existence in 1959. As the country gained its independence and international sovereignty, the national team played its official first international encounter on April 13, 1960, against Somalia and beats them 9-2. It was then the beginning of the international legend of the national team officially baptized "Indomitable Lions of Cameroon" by presidential decree in 1972.

Such a political intervention and interest in the football matter reflected in the choice of the official name of the national team has nothing anodyne. Under president Ahidjo as well as president Paul Biya (Pigeaud, 2011: 182), football is usually quoted as a good example that the whole nation should follow to achieve its development, namely through their legendary "fighting spirit" (Pigeaud, 2011: 186) or as a perfect school case of national integration regardless of the religion, the political party, the cultural group of belonging, given the large sociological diversity of communities, more than 200 communities. Football is thus the cement of the rich cultural diversity of Cameroon and an instrument of social cohesion and integration. Discussing the national team, the football players as well as their performances at home or abroad is at the very heart of Cameroonian's daily debates. And the government knows how important is the issue as can be seen through frequent inferences of the politics in this sport's field.

The National Football Team as International Showcase of Cameroon

The Cameroon national football team is a holistic concept incorporating male and female categories. In each category, we have the senior, the junior as well as minims. Though Cameroon's female football team already partook in two World Cups of their category (2015 in Canada and 2019 in France), their participation in the major competitions is still too recent for deep analysis. So, talking about the national football team in this paper mostly refers to the male senior category.

The Cameroon side usually takes part in the African cup of nations which is the most prominent football tournament in Africa. This competition was first held in 1957. Cameroon took part in the event for the first time in 1970. So far, their national team has been present to 19 editions out of a total of 32; and won five trophies namely in Ivory Coast in 1984, in Morocco in 1988, the one jointly organized by Nigeria and Mali in 2000, in Ghana's edition of 2002 and Gabon in 2017. This makes Cameroon a giant in Africa ranking second directly behind Egypt which won seven titles so far. And the most interesting aspect here is that all those titles were conquered abroad. By winning all its trophies away from home, Cameroon would leave the image of a "football crack" in those countries and within their national opinion. It is argued that sport works softly as a diplomatic lubricant. Sports can create public interest and public goodwill, and appeal directly to the public, to provide a favorable environment for a nation to manage its international relations. Though rarely a sufficient condition for diplomacy, sport can be effective in facilitating changes or increasing momentum in diplomatic practices.

Sports can be a factor in dialogue with partner countries. Sports can be used as a tool to project a state's image to the rest of the world. It can build stronger relationships with other states. The FIFA world cup is a good example to illustrate this case. Especially the 1990's edition held in Italy where Cameroon produced a tremendous performance. In the Bleacher Report's ranking of the top 50 African players of all-time¹⁰, there are 11 Cameroonians including the two best goalkeepers in Africa: Thomas N'kono and Bell Joseph. The latter was even elected as the best African football goalkeeper of the 20th century by the International Federation of Football History and Statistics (IFFHS) a FIFA branch¹¹.

⁹ http://fecafoot-officiel.com/?page_id=703, retrieved 2016/12/24

¹⁰ The 50 Greatest African Players of All Time, <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1781781-the-50-greatest-african-players-of-all-time#slide2>, accessed on 25/08/2019.

¹¹ IFFHS History: Africa – Player Of The Century (1900-1999), <https://iffhs.De/iffhs-History-Africa-Player-Of-The-Century-1900-1999/>, Accessed On 25/08/2019.

Furthermore, the “Indomitable Lions” of Cameroon are recognized as the greatest African team of all time with the highest attendance to the FIFA World Cup as indicated and considering all their successes in the African Cup of Nations as well as other major events¹². They also hold a record of consecutive participation in the World Cup for an African team; being present successively in 1990, 1994, 1998, and 2002. These high performances are crown in 2003 as they are the only African team to date to reach the final match of the FIFA Confederation’s Cup.

The first Cameroonian participation in the World Cup was in Spain (1982), then followed Italy (1990), the U.S. (1994), France (1998), the joined edition of Japan-South Korea (2002), South Africa (2010), and the one in Brazil (2014). But all the post-1990 editions have not been that successful as the country is frequently eliminated at the group stage. During the edition in Spain, Cameroon had three draws and then left Spain neither with a victory nor were they defeated. And it was already an exploit, but the best was still to come.

Italian World Cup 1990: The Opening Gate of Cameroon to Europe and the World

It was 6:00 pm that Friday, June 8, 1990, at the stadium *Giuseppe Meazza* of Milan, when in the heat of a summer afternoon, the French referee Michel Vautrot, whistled the kickoff of what will soon enter the legend as one of the most memorable football matches in World Cup history. The encounter between Cameroon and Argentina, as the opening match of the tournament, was no less than an epic "David vs Goliath" challenge. Simon Burnton journalist at the Irish Times magazine commenting on the victory of Cameroon against Argentina at that FIFA World Cup could write, "of the great World Cup upsets...this one stand alone in myth and memory...as the World Cup champions, led by the great Diego Maradona, was vanquished by an unheralded team" (Burnton, 1990). He continued: "It was not a perfect match, but it was an irresistible narrative" (Burnton, 1990). Cameroon defeating Argentina the incumbent champion in a 1-0 score, sounded unbelievable not to say impossible, but it happened with that goal in the 65th minute from François Omam-Biyik.

To date, that victory stands as one of the most powerful messages Cameroon has ever sent to the world in terms of image. Even the Italian football supporters well known for their racism kept praising the name of Cameroon all match long. This was also since the Captain of Argentina, Diego Maradona who was a player in the Italian football championship, had just won the "Serie A title from Milan by two points" with Napoli at that time. So Milan’s supporters in the stadium took it as revenge to mock him. And at the end of the encounter, Maradona just seized the opportunity to say he could cure the Italians of racism as he stated: "The whole stadium was shouting for Cameroon (...). "Wasn't that nice?" No matter, as David Lacey a British chronicler wrote, in the newspaper *The Guardian*, "this was no fluke, the better team won" (Burnton, 1990). And the astounding part of it is that "they won, moreover, after ending with nine men on the field ... Such was their superiority that the Africans still finished looking as if they had more men on the pitch than their hapless opponents" (Burnton, 1990).

The match will soon turn into a powerful diplomatic momentum, as the young head of state of Cameroon, President Paul Biya, who assumed office some eight years ago before that tournament, will be warmly congratulated by dozen of his homolog who partook in that opening ceremony. Diplomatically, indeed, that match succeeded at least in two ways: first, in branding the name Cameroon; and secondly, it permitted other heads of state to physically recognize the president of Cameroon. For the next matches, Cameroon later defeated Romania 2-1 and lost to the Soviet Union 0-4, becoming the first side to top a World Cup Finals group with a negative goal difference. In the second round, Cameroon defeated Colombia 2-1 with the 38-year-old Roger Milla scoring two goals in the extra-time.

In the quarterfinals, Cameroon faced England. And despite their heroism, they lost 3-2 in extra time. During that tournament, the Indomitable Lions were no more looked at as belonging to sole Cameroon. It was now the team carrying all the dreams and wishes of the African continent and beyond. As Simon Burnton puts it quoting a football analyst of the British magazine *The Telegraph*: "A lady in a floral dress and turban did a handstand, but across Africa and beyond. When they have finally knocked out a woman in Bangladesh committed suicide, writing that "the elimination of Cameroon means the end of my life" (Burnton, 1990). Whether this is the truth or part of the legend, it all reminds the power of the “world’s

¹² Top 10 Best National Football Teams In Africa (Latest Ranking), <https://Answersafrica.Com/Top-10-Best-National-Football-Teams-In-Africa-Latest-2015-Ranking.Html>, Accessed On 25/08/2019.

most beautiful game” and its ability to talk to people beyond borders and to bring the image of Cameroon far around the world and in individual’s daily life. What captivates the attention here is the fact that the same as this Irish Journalist highlighted, the world has come to discover Cameroon through this incredible sport momentum. People checked their world map to see where Cameroon is.

After Cameroon was eliminated from the tournament at the ¼ final, many voices always said that football did for Cameroon in one sports event more than classical diplomacy would have done since the independence of the country in the 1960s. Giving the country worldwide notoriety. It is something that I witness every single day while traveling abroad as people interacting with me keep reminding Cameroon through the 1990's Italian World Cup, the image of Roger Milla, or more recently Samuel Eto'o Fils. More than a mere football, it was all about the image of a country, a nation, and a whole continent. The Cameroon side thus redefined and demystified the way African football was perceived through stereotypes (Burton, 1990). It should be reminded that apart from Morocco who reached the world cup 1/8 final in 1986, with what Cameroon did in 1990 which was the first time an African team played the quarter-final. In aftermath of that, the number of teams at the FIFA World Cup will be moved from 24 to 32, and Africa so far with only 2 qualifying places in the final round of the tournament will be awarded 3 more places thanks to the memorable success of Cameroon (Ebanga-Mballa, 2009: 94).

As William Rugh emphasized, public diplomacy by directly targeting people in foreign countries generates the best way through which a country spreads smoothly its soft power. Therefore, those concepts of public diplomacy and soft power are interrelated since they nourished each other (Rugh, 2009: 7). In this field a small country like Qatar, which many people may not be able to locate on a world map, is well fitted as they utilize the diplomacy of sport and football to acquire international respectability. Qatar is the owner of the major team of the French championship PSG and many other satellite clubs. Qatar has been able to carry out major actions in international sports in general, including youth football, through the "Aspire Academy Foundation"¹³ and its derivative projects "Aspire Football Dream" and "Hope Project". And it is this same Qatar that will host the 2022 FIFA World Cup (Antwi-Boateng, 2013: 45-46).

Gold for the Gods of Olympus: When the “Lions” Conquered Sidney 2000

The worldwide famous reputation of Cameroon in the football area is also related to its brilliant success at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney in Australia where Cameroon conquered the second African gold medal in the history of Olympic football. Maybe after the Italian episode of 1990, opponents would now take African teams with more seriousness. But still, Cameroon though somewhat underrated, succeeded to defeat successively the Brazil of Ronaldinho and Lucio, the Chile of Zamorano, and the Spain of Jose Mari and the future emblematic players of Barcelona Carlos Puyol and Xavi. With that victory, Cameroon then had the double distinction of being African and Olympic champions in the same year¹⁴. Therefore, there is no surprise that Cameroonian “golden boys” could reign on the football planet after that remarkable Australian episode as most of them will be playing in European major clubs like Barcelona, Real de Madrid, Espanyol, Arsenal, PSG, etc. Sidney contributed to echo the legend of “Indomitable Lions” that Cameroonian authorities always set as an example to follow in their diverse speeches.

Football and Politics in Cameroon

Conscious of the high level of attractiveness of major sporting events, and in the fear of seeing sports arenas transformed into the ground of political claims, sports federations quickly proclaimed the neutrality of their game as well as any collusion between sport and politics. However, this does not mean the exclusion of politics. How could it be otherwise when in many countries or almost everywhere, it is the policy that coordinates the sports movement? It is the same in Cameroon as well. Since the very genesis of football in Cameroon and the creation of the national team of Indomitable Lions, politics has always been present and active.

President Ahidjo had realized the power of attraction of football and how much it could be a powerful instrument of communication both nationally and internationally (Pigeaud, 2011: 182-185). To that effect, the “Lions” were regularly received at the presidential palace after their successes. Similarly, he most often referred to the Lions' "spirit of combativeness" in his speeches to galvanize young people

¹³ <https://www.aspire.qa/Default.aspx>, accessed on 17/08/2019.

¹⁴ <http://abcnews.go.com/Sports/story?id=100363&page=1>, retrieved the 2016/12/24.

internally, and to present the youth of his country in international speeches. The same goes for President Paul Biya who took the office after him and used to emphasize the “fighting spirit of the Indomitable Lions”.

According to some private revelations, President Paul Biya is very active in giving his opinion regarding the appointing of the national team’s technical head staff (Pigeaud, 2011: 185). Sport chroniclers always remind that he is the one who decided that Roger Milla should be part of the national team traveling to the FIFA World Cup in Italy in 1990 while aged 38 and is considered too old by football observers and some of his teammates. Some even say that in Italy in 1990, he further ensured the goalkeeper Thomas N’kono played while the expected one Joseph Bell was dismissed (Wilson, 2013). And coincidentally or not, all those choices have proven to be efficient ones. He repeated the same in 2004 with Patrick Mboma whereas the national coach at that time had a divergent opinion (Pigeaud, 2011: 184). Likewise, he is probably the one who convince the world-class footballer Samuel Eto’o to be among the 23 Cameroonian players partaking in the FIFA World Cup 2014 in Brazil although the latter had decided a few months ago to retire from the national team in 2013. It is not the first time that President Biya has stepped in to prevent a player from retiring. This goes in the perfect sense of what Joseph Nye noticed as he says that the public diplomacy’s task is to try to attract foreign publics by drawing attention to appropriate aspects of its society and policies (Rugh, 2009: 14). Cameroonian leaders from Ahidjo to Biya have a keen knowledge of the uses that can be made of the power of sport and football as a means of mass communication. This is often reflected in the implementation of football diplomacy.

High-Level State Visits, image, and Football

After he retired from the football milieu, Roger Milla, the legend of the 1990 World Cup was appointed traveling ambassador. Which makes him a distinguished member of the delegations of the head of state’s official visits abroad. Football has become a strong argument for the international trips of leaders. The football-based public diplomacy of the Cameroonian head of state was particularly emphasized in 2013 as he rendered an official visit to Turkey following the one that his counterpart Abdullah Gül paid to Cameroon in 2010. For that important trip not only the head of state had as part of his delegation Mr. Rigobert Song who was the former captain of the Cameroonian national team, but also he meet with the Cameroonian football players performing in Turkey.

It should be recalled that Rigobert Song who played for Cameroon’s national team for more than 18 years also played in the Turkish football championship (Süper Lig) namely with Galatasaray from 2004 to 2008 and Trabzonspor football club from 2008 to 2010. After spending the main part of his football career in major European clubs, the world star of Cameroonian origin Samuel Eto’o Fils also played in Turkey from 2015 to 2018 (mostly in Antalya Spor and a few months in Konya Spor in 2018). The Turkish "Süper Lig" also attracted other Cameroonians such as Gérémi Njitap, Achille Webo, Carlos Kameni, Chedjou Aurelien, Stephane Mbia, Landry Nguemo, and the list is not exhaustive.

They are all bearers of the voices and the image of Cameroon in Turkish society as he would say. And naturally, the presence of those players in the Turkish championship made some football fans in Cameroon shift their traditional habits from Western European football and be more focused on football highlights in Turkey. Thus, during his official trip to Turkey in 2013, the meeting of President Paul Biya with a Cameroonian footballer in Turkey was far from being a mere protocol activity. As public diplomacy is a way of addressing foreign public opinion, this was done to captivate and crystallize national attention just as Turkish media and people will report the facts later.

The International Success Story of Cameroon Football Clubs

The success story of Cameroonian football is not just written with the national team. Apart from the national team Cameroon also counts many football teams in clubs playing in the national championship which are part of the country’s famous reputation abroad since they recorded many successes and dominated the African tournaments for a while with teams like: “*Canon de Yaoundé*”, “*Tonnerre Kalara Club*”, and “*Union de Douala*”. From 1971 to 1981 the three teams won seven (7) African championship titles (Pigeaud, 2011: 182). In 1984, 2000, 2002, 2003, and 2008 respectively “*Canon de Yaoundé*” (1984 and 2000), “*Union de Douala*” (2002), and “*Coton Sport de Garoua*” (2003 and 2008) played some African championships finals but failed in winning. Still, they kept a good reputation and recognition. Indeed, although they have been experiencing a relative slowdown since the 2000s, it should be stressed that they exercised a supreme reign over African football in the 1970s. In those times they built

the bulk of African football's most iconic images and stars, before Mboma and Eto'o Fils could revamp that vibe in the 2000s.

Nation Branding through "International Individual Football Awards and Honours"

The brilliant story of the "Indomitable Lions" of Cameroon is above all the history of several generations of exceptional football players (Kana, 2014). Beyond the collective skills of the squad, it is also and above all a story of individual talents whose recognition, each time, has brought to the frontstage their country, Cameroon.

A Legend Called Roger Milla

The "Old Lion" as close friends call him, Roger Milla entered the memory of football after the outstanding participation of Cameroon in the 1990 FIFA World Cup in Italy. He was twice African footballer of the year in the 1980s. He participated in several African Cups with Cameroon, as well as three world cups. To date, he is still the oldest scorer in World Cup history with his goal in the 1994 edition in the US while aged 42¹⁵. Although he mostly played at a time when African players did not yet enjoy a worthy consideration of their talent abroad, Milla also won titles with his different clubs in France.

At the end of his career, he is made an ambassador of the UNAIDS on the joint program HIV/AIDS to sensitive African youth on the disease. He is also appointed traveling ambassador by the head of state and carries the voice of Cameroon's football abroad. Milla is ranked among the FIFA 100 greatest living footballers. He was rated the best African footballer of the 20^e century by the African Confederation of Football (CAF) and second by the IFFHS¹⁶. Milla was a central figure on the Campaign Team for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. *"I'm trying to show that Africa can stage a World Cup that is just as good as the previous ones"*¹⁷ he stated to the website Fifa.com.

A World Class Footballer: Samuel Eto'o Fils

It is quite impossible to talk about the African and world football of the last two decades without mentioning the name Samuel Eto'o Fils. His name alone has become a brand. This is certainly the reason why he was appointed special adviser to the current CAF president. Eto'o is a four-time African player of the year. To date, Eto'o is the top scorer of the African Nations Cup with 18 goals in six editions. He won the tournament twice in 2000 and 2002 consecutively. He was part of the golden boys at the Sidney Olympics in 2000, and also the squad that had the privilege to reach the final of the FIFA Confederations Cup in 2003. Samuel Eto'o is also the all-time top scorer of the Cameroon side, with 56 goals in 118 participations.

He had a very exceptional career in European clubs as he played for Real Madrid, Majorca, and Barcelona in Spain and Internazionale of Milan in Italy, just to name a few. Thus, he won four times the prestigious UEFA Champions League: twice with Barcelona, once with Internazionale, and once with Real Madrid in 1999 his early beginnings¹⁸. He won the Spanish league three times with Barcelona and another one with Internazionale. He won many other cups in his different championships. He scored more than 340 goals in his career. Eto'o appears as the most titled African player apart from the FIFA World Player of the "Ballon d'Or" that are the only award missing him together with a World Cup trophy. Eto'o was once rated as the best number 9 of all time at FC Barcelona as well as the best African player of all time.

Together with players such people as Geremi Njitap, Etame Mayer, and Patrick Mboma who even played in Japan, these different awards make Cameroonian footballers prominent figures of world football. They are both relays and influential people, both internally and internationally. This highlights the "cult of celebrity" and embodies the diplomacy of strong individual figures that is "individuals who are well-known for their well-knownness" (Park, 2017). In that perspective, it is alleged that many Turkish players of Antalya Spor could have greeted their head of state President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan thanks to Eto'o Fils as the President made the trip to Antalya twice to meet with him. He was the special guest

¹⁵ The 50 Greatest African Players of All Time, <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1781781-the-50-greatest-african-players-of-all-time#slide2>, accessed on 25/08/2019.

¹⁶ <https://iffhs.com/dev/legends/>, accessed on 25/08/2019.

¹⁷ Roger the lion still roaring, <https://www.fifa.com/news/roger-the-lion-still-roaring-738213#roger-milla-cameroon-518309>, accessed on 25/08/2019.

¹⁸ The 50 Greatest African Players of All Time, *op. cit.*

of President Erdoğan during the G-20 Summit that Turkey hosted in November 2015 in the same city of Antalya. This makes him a perfect lubricant and echo of Cameroon's soft power of football. During that G-20, Eto'o had private meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and later on, he was conveyed as a special guest, for the World Cup Russia hosted in 2018.

All these dynamics with and around Samuel Eto'o illustrate the diplomacy of prominent individual figures generated by the Cameroonian soft power of football, as well as the public diplomacy that goes with it. Such prominent and intermediary figures symbolize a quite perfect example of the "authority of sport over souls" (Park, 2017) and its spiritual suggestive power. However, they are still identified in public opinions and perceptions through their state and their nationality. Michael Park emphasizes that: "While governments have increasingly engaged in sports diplomacy for nation branding, celebrity athletes can also contribute to a country's diplomacy efforts even when the athletes' involvement is not a direct result of formal diplomatic engagement" (Park, 2017).

"A Lions Never Die": The Singular Story of the Marc-Vivien Foe Award

During the 2003 FIFA Confederations Cup in France, the death of the Cameroonian midfielder Marc-Vivien Foe on the pitch in the 72nd minute of the semi-final against Colombia illustrates how the soft power of football and public diplomacy of sport can also be channeled through tragic and emotional events. Sport is above all entertainment, and no one should lose his life while sporting. That is why the story of Foe toured the world and was somehow seen as martyrdom. Messages of condolences came from all over the world towards his family and the state as well. Though, the impact at the level of soft power and public diplomacy comes from the fact that since 2003, the trophy awarded to the best African player of the French football championship changed its name. From then on, it is known as the "Marc-Vivien Foe Trophy" in recognition of all his commitments and achievements. So, beyond the only person of Foe, this shows an acknowledgment of the image of Cameroon and its civil society as well as its non-state actors.

Cameroon in the Main Management of Football's Institutions

Cameroon is not only a major player in football on the pitch. He also plays an important role in the governing bodies of football. All this has been well personified through the image of Mr. Issa Hayatou.

Cameroon and Football Management at the CAF level

As a sportsman since his youth, Issa Hayatou has tremendously expanded beyond the traditional family field of influence, embracing Cameroon, Africa, and then the world at large. He first served as the chairman of Cameroon's football federation from 1986 to 1988. After that, he joined the CAF, where his different achievements shed a new horizon on the development of African football. Whereas Africa had only two qualifying places in the World Cup, based on an argument illustrated by the success of Cameroon at the 1990 World Cup. He was able to obtain from FIFA that the number of places granted to Africa be increased by three additional places, bringing the total to five. It should be noted that this measure is accompanied by an increase in the number of qualifiers for the final stages of the World Cup. Same as well, he increased the number of qualifiers for the African Nations Cup to 16.

Under Issa Hayatou, special provisions were also made for youth football, especially those under U-20 and U-17. The women's championship will also benefit further developments. Furthermore, some changes are brought into African cup championships by the mid-1990s concerning the CAF Champions league. His contributions are also significant regarding the massive support to the technical development of football in Africa through the financing of the building of CAF's Technical Development Centers. He retired in 2017.

Cameroon and Football Management at the FIFA level

This is for sure one of the main achievements of Cameroon's football and how the country could impact the world at large. Having worked as head of the African football Confederation CAF since 1988, the Cameroonian Issa Hayatou was also a FIFA vice-president since 1992, and an Executive Committee member since 1990. Following Joseph Blatter's suspension by FIFA's Ethics Committee, Issa Hayatou while president of the CAF is appointed to run the world's football organization FIFA to ensure the transition from October 2015 to February 2016. As quoted by the British media BBC, some 111 years on

from its founding, “FIFA is now being technically run by an African for the first time”¹⁹. All those individual figures in their activities are assimilated abroad with Cameroon’s image and brand. They carry the image of their country within people’s minds.

CONCLUSION:

Since the end of the Cold War, the concept of diplomacy has undergone fundamental transformations, mainly with the irruption of societies and informal actors in a field that was once kept for States alone. The notion of public diplomacy is thus one of the illustrations of these changes. This goes hand in hand with the refinement of the concept of power making public diplomacy an instrument of circulation and diffusion of the soft power of states as identified by Joseph Nye.

The case study of sport and football in particular applied here illustrates how nations utilize sport at a domestic level and abroad to build the image and the imagination. The example of Cameroonian football here shows how, through sport, a country can seize and shape collective imaginaries. Success on the football field then becomes an asset of branding and projecting enchanting images of who we are and what we can do. The hosting of the 2021 African Nations Cup in Cameroon will play a strategic tool in fostering this vision of foreign policy. It is well known that international sporting ‘mega-events’ put a country in the spotlight and showcase its capabilities (Qingmin, 2008). Such events usually worked as powerful tools for sending international messages (Kobierecki, 2013: 64-65). Through the image and imagination of football, Cameroon reaffirms itself at the domestic stage as a strong and stable nation, and at the same time capitalizes on the international sympathy and attractiveness of its major sport as the state is referred to as the land of football and the nation of Indomitable Lions. Furthermore, by organizing the 2022 FIFA World Cup, precisely during the months of November and December, Qatar, although tiny on the geographical map, has become the center of the political and sporting world. Whether through criticism of human rights issues or the travel of certain statesmen for the event, Qatar left no one indifferent. In the same vein, the participation of the Cameroon national team in this World Cup in Qatar, which despite being eliminated in the first round ended with a victory in the third group match against Brazil, awakened international sympathy around the Cameroon squad, both in public opinion and in foreign public spheres in line with the conceptual approach of the new public diplomacy.

References

- Antwi-Boateng O. (2013). “The rise of Qatar as a Soft Power and the Challenges”, *European Scientific Journal*, (December) /SPECIAL/ edition vol.2 ISSN: 1857 – 7881.
- Batistella D. (1993). “Fin de la guerre froide, fin de l’état de guerre ?” in *Politique Etrangère*, Vol.58, N°3.
- Beacom A. (2000). “Sport in International Relations: A Case for Cross-Disciplinary Investigation”, *The Sports Historian*, 20, 2, 2000 (November), Published By The British Society of Sports History.
- Blake P. (2015). “Fifa scandal: Why the US is policing a global game”, *BBC News*, Washington, May, online on <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32889845>, accessed on 15/08/2019.
- Boorstin, D. J. (2012). *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Boyacıoğlu F., Oğuz A. G. (2016). “The Role of Sports in International Relations”, *AUDRI*, Vol. 9, N°1.
- Braudel F. (1958). “Histoire et Sciences sociales : La longue durée”, In: *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*. 13^e année, N. 4, pp. 725-753.
- Burnton S. (1990). “World Cup moments: Cameroon’s Indomitable Lions stun Argentina in 1990”, <https://www.irishtimes.com/sport/soccer/international/world-cup-moments-cameroon-s-indomitable-lions-stun-argentina-in-1990-1.3478973>, accessed on 21/08/2019.
- Charillon F. and De Hoop Scheffer A. (2006). “Les USA : les dilemmes de la puissance”, in Charillon, F. (eds), *Les notices des relations internationales*, Paris : éd. CERSA.

¹⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34480179>, retrieved on 2016/12/24.

- CPD. (2019). "Defining Public Diplomacy", (CPD: Center on Public Diplomacy). <https://www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org/page/what-is-pd>, accessed on 20/08/2019.
- Dunning E. (1999). *Sport Matters: Sociological Studies of Sport, Violence and Civilization*, London: Routledge.
- Easton D. (1953). *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Ebanga-Mballa R. (2009). *La part du Lion: L'encyclopédie de l'histoire du football du Cameroun*, AuthorHouse.
- Elias N. and Dunning E. (1986). *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process*, Oxford: Blackwell; revised and enlarged edition, Dublin: UCD Press, 2008 (Collected Works, vol. 7).
- Faouzi M. (1982). "Cameroun : les "Lions indomptables" dans l'arène espagnole" [archive], sur *politique-africaine.com*.
- Garcia C. (2012). "The Use of Sports as a Tool of Public Diplomacy in Regions or "Stateless Nations": The Case of the Basque Country in Contemporary Spain", in *Journal of Sport Media*, Vol.7, N°2.
- Grote M. (2015). *What could the 'Longue Durée' mean for the History of Modern Sciences?*, FMSH-WP-2015-98, june.
- Guilianotti R. and Robertson R. (2013). "Sport and Globalization." In *A Companion to Sport*, edited by David. L. Andrews and Ben Carrington, 41-60. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.
- Harit F. (2011). "Thomas Nkono, premier gardien noir d'Europe", 30 avril 2, <http://www.afrik-foot.com/article22741.html#zSEvKGH67KoEHlH.99>, retrieved on 2016/12/17.
- <http://abcnews.go.com/Sports/story?id=100363&page=1>, retrieved the 2016/12/24.
- http://fecafoot-officiel.com/?page_id=703, retrieved on 2016/12/24
- <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34480179> retrieved on 2016/12/24.
- <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34480179>, retrieved on 2016/12/24.
- <http://www.cahiersdufootball.net/article-omam-biyik-1990-l-afrique-s-envole-3677> retrieved on 2016/11/05
- <http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroun-rayonnement-la-diplomatie-du-ballon-rond-208227.html> retrieved on 2016/11/05
- <http://www.crystalinks.com/romesports.html>, retrieved on 2016/11/05 <http://www.primaryhomework-help.co.uk/greece/sports.htm>, retrieved on December 2016/12/.28
- <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2015/oct/08/iss-hayatou-acting-president-fifa-sepp-blatter-suspended>, retrieved on 2016/12/24.
- Huijgh E. (2012). *Changing Tunes for Public Diplomacy: Exploring the Domestic Dimension*, Netherland Institute of International Relations.
- IFFHS History: Africa – Player of the Century (1900-1999), <https://iffhs.de/iffhs-history-africa-player-of-the-century-1900-1999/>
- IOC (2019). Olympic Charter, International Olympic Committee's, Lausanne Switzerland.
- Kana C. (2014), *La fabuleuse histoire des Lions indomptables. De Samuel Mbappé Léppé à Samuel Éto'o*, Teham.
- Kelley J. R. (2014). *From Monologue to Dialogue?: U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Post-9/11 Era*, Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the University of London (2007), Published by ProQuest LLC, 2014.
- Kobierecki M. M. (2013). "Sport in International Relations. Expectations, Possibilities and Effects", *International Studies Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal*, Vol. 15, N° 1.

- Lee R. E. (2012). *The Longue Durée and World System Analysis*, State University of New York Press.
- Manzenreiter W. (2008). "Football Diplomacy, Post-colonialism and Japan's Quest for Normal State Status", *Sport in Society*, 11:4.
- McLellan S. (2016). "Sport: A Tool for International Diplomacy", http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australian_outlook/sport-a-tool-for-international-diplomacy/, retrieved on 11/15/2016.
- Melissen J. (2011). "Beyond the New Public Diplomacy", Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael.
- Milla selected among the FIFA 100 greatest living footballers, <https://iffhs.com/dev/legends/>
- Nauright J. (2013). "Selling Nations to the World through Sports: Mega-Events and Nation Branding as Global Diplomacy" in *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, Winter.
- Nye J. S. (1990). "Soft Power", *Foreign Policy*, N°80, Twentieth Anniversary, (Autumn).
- Nye J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs.
- Nye J. S. (2008). "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power", *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616.
- Park M. K. (2017). "Long Shot: The Prospects and Limitations of Sports and Celebrity Athlete Diplomacy", In *Media* [Online], 6, 2017, Online since 18 December 2017, on <http://journals.openedition.org/inmedia/855>, accessed on 30/07/2019.
- Parnaud and Riordan J. (Eds.). (2003). *Sport and international Relations. The impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport*, London & New York: Routledge.
- Pigeaud F. (2011). *Au Cameroun de Paul Biya*, Paris : Karthala.
- Qingmin Z. (2013). "Sports Diplomacy: The Chinese Experience and Perspective", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, N°8.
- Roger the lion still roaring, <https://www.fifa.com/news/roger-the-lion-still-roaring-738213#roger-milla-cameroon-518309>, accessed on 25/08/2019.
- Rugh W. A. (2009). "The Case for Soft Power", in Philip Seib (ed.) *Toward a New Public Diplomacy. Redirecting U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Şahin M. and Çevik B. Senem (2015). "Türkiye'de Kamu Diplomasisi ve Yumuşak Güç", in Mehmet Şahin and B. Senem Çevik (Eds.) *Türk Dış Politikası ve Kamu Diplomasisi*, Ankara: Nobel, 2015.
- Seib P. (2009). "Toward a New Public Diplomacy", Philip Seib (Ed.) *Redirecting U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Soccernet. (2019). "Top 10 Greatest African Players of all time / Africa's 10 Greatest Football Legends of All Time", <https://soccernet.ng/2019/02/top-10-greatest-african-players-of-all-time.html>, accessed on 15/08/2020.
- Sport-diplomacy. (2016). "Should Sports and Politics always Mix?" online <https://sportdiplomacy.wordpress.com/2012/09/11/should-sports-and-politics-always-mix/> retrieved on 2016/11/15
- Top 10 best National Football Teams in Africa (Latest Ranking), <https://answersafrica.com/top-10-best-national-football-teams-in-africa-latest-2015-ranking.html>
- Ushkovska M. and Petrushevska T. (2015). "Sports Diplomacy: Development and Practices", *Research in Kinesiology*, Vol. 43, N° 1.
- Wilson J. (2013). *The Outsider: A History of the Goalkeeper*, Orion: UK ed. Edition.
- Zintz T. (2016). "When Soft Diplomacy meets with Public Diplomacy: European Sport Diplomacy Perspective" <http://eose.org/2016/07/when-soft-diplomacy-meets-public-diplomacy-european-sport-diplomacy-perspective/>, retrieved on 2016/11/15.