

An exploration of the cultural intersect in communication media of BNP Paribas in
Bahrain

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Attestation of Authorship

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning'.

Signed:

Olivia Tripon

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Abstract

The concept of cross culture and cultural identity of multinationals operating in various countries have been challenged by the notion of globalisation in the course of these last centuries. Thus, the question of cultural specificities has been put in jeopardy and has challenged organisations 'desire to create an original cultural identity in order to differentiate them in this competitive market.

This study explores the cultural interactions within the corporate identity of a French bank: BNP Paribas in Bahrain. The research tends to identify the cultural impacts of the French/European and the Bahraini Middle Eastern culture on the bank's visual communication media. Because the bank is operating in a region rules by Islam, the purpose of the thesis is to understand to which extent BNP Paribas adheres to the cultural specificities of Bahrain and the Middle East in correlation with the corporate own national identity (French/ European).

A mixed method approach of a case study including semiotics and iconography visuals analysis of the bank's communication media and semi-structured interviews of communication professionals has been followed.

The findings revealed that BNP Paribas did adapt its communication to the local Arabic Middle Eastern culture keeping therefore their own cultural code mainly derived from the French European cultural identity. Further, the bank did avoid religious symbols with the concern of portraying an alliance and unity between both countries which have created a global culture expressed through cultural patterns and stereotypes.

The bank' main communication strategy in term of culture is to be 'glocal'. They tend to represent the local culture within a global idea of culture. As a result, the bank avoided deeper cultural symbolism such as the religious ones to only focus on portraying a cultural identity representing harmony, social unity and alliance between both European and Middle Eastern countries. In creating a glocal approach through a bricolage of culture mixing French and Arabic cultural themes, BNP Paribas puts in

scene cultural similarities between both countries and takes the risk to promote a global culture where cultural specificities that actively participate to the construction of identity are wiped out.

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Chapter one: Introduction

This first chapter introduces important ground theories that place the purpose of the research into context. The purpose of the thesis is to identify and analyse all aspects of cross culture especially within the relationship between French and Bahraini culture within the BNP Paribas visual corporate identity.

1.1 General overview of the proposed research

Questions of culture and cultural specificities within the concept of globalisation have always been of interest to the author and looking at French culture in correlation with Arabic/Islamic culture was an interesting way to understand the mechanism of culture. Coming from a French background allowed the author to understand the cultural context of the French bank BNP Paribas and its potential difficulties to adapt to other cultures. Having lived for a long period in the Middle East, the author is also very familiar with the culture of that region. The author grew up in the Middle East and went to an Arabic school which gave her the opportunity to comprehend the deeper layers of Arab culture.

The author conducted research into the cultural context of the BNP Paribas in Bahrain. Having been a trainee in the communication department there for four months and based the research on her knowledge, theories on culture, cross-cultural communication and corporate identity. Being in the position of an observer participant allowed the author to look closely at Bahrain's cultural complexities and the cultural challenges the bank faced in regards to Arabic/Islamic culture and specifically the Bahraini political and economic situation. Analysing the cultural diversities and complexities of both the French culture and that of the Middle East in relation to the question of globalisation constitutes the essence of the research.

The concept of globalisation has taken an important place within theoretical and daily debate in recent years. Nowadays, globalisation is a term overused to express a cultural homogenisation, where cultural particularities are slowly wiped out, to be

replaced by the “global” concept. Thus, globally-standardised advertising campaigns have been successfully implemented by many international companies over recent years. Global standardisation is a preferred strategy of multinationals as it is an efficient time and money-saving international strategy. The effect of globalisation within visual media has resulted in the idea that places and people around the world have become more and more interconnected and share similar experiences and cultural practices (Gwizdalski, 2009). Consequently, the question of cultural specificities seems to be obsolete in a world where global culture tends to dominate. However it would be wrong to reduce or miscalculate the impact of local and cultural specificities. It seemed essential, to challenge the concept of globalisation and to look closely at the mechanism of cultures and cultural differences in order to understand how and to what extent cultural features impact on corporate communication and multinationals. Thus, the concept of globalisation as a cultural process will be analysed and verified with reference to BNP Paribas’s visual communication media.

Several definitions have been attributed to globalisation where the term reflects a change of cultural practices within different societies.

Throughout the 20th century, academics have understood the world to be divided by differences in tribes, races, ethnic groups and nation states. Before the concept and phenomenon of globalisation, ‘culture’ meant ‘national culture’ (Ladegaard, 2007). However, the 21st century world is a place where the term globalisation is justified. National identities are no longer prevalent; instead we witness cultural complexities and diversities, cosmopolitanism and transnational identity (Ladegaard, 2007). Societies and most countries have been subjected to a global economy, enhanced by vast and varied telecommunications and a rapid movement of merchandise and the migration of population (Shiller, 1994; Ladegaard, 2007).

Culture has become less and less a national consensus but a consensus built on common ethnic, generational, regional, ideological, occupation or gender-related interests, with and across national business (Ladegaard 2007, p.141).

According to Pieterse (2009), globalisation is being shaped by technological changes and is producing a demand for globalisation. As a result, corporations begin to define themselves as global and communication media try to be accessible to as many culture as possible and be as culturally homogeneous as possible. The new concept of 'global culture' reached its peak, and drew its definition from the concepts of the melting pot, folk cultures and other pieces of pre-existing national cultures centred around global corporations and institutions (Ladegaard, 2007). Global marketing and the need to create global brands 'has made for an increase in global advertising expenditures from \$39 billion in 1950 to \$256 billion in 1990, growing three times faster than trade (Pieterse 2009, p.9). A process of deregulation and globalisation took place within communication and especially activities such as advertising (Featherstone, 1990).

Audio-visual geographies are becoming detached from the symbolic spaces of national culture and realigned on the basis of the more universal principles of international consumer culture (Morley & Robins, 1995, p.23).

Historically, media had a double role which was to serve the political-public sphere of the nation state and to draw attention to national cultural identification. Nowadays, television and other media are seen as global tools, without frontiers, established in a global order with global priorities. As a result, 'the new reality of media is driven more by market opportunity than by national identity' (Morley & Robins, 1995, p.18).

Therefore, globalisation, rather than homogenising cultures, is producing or perpetuating distinctive cultural practices and differentiates identities' (Shiller, 1994, p.1). Global media must be sensitive to the cultural environment and local culture in which they operate.

1.2 Research questions

Several questions and issues regarding cross-cultural interaction and globalisation have been addressed as a starting point for this research. These questions have helped the researcher to form the overarching research question and to create the research topic.

The following questions reflected the main purpose of the thesis and guided the researcher in identifying the relationship between cultures and its impact on corporate identity, especially in regards to visual communication media.

- The purpose of this study is to understand how communication media draw a culture as an identity. The question resulting from this is: What is the link between these two notions? This will be tackled in the literature review.
- What are the communication barriers that the bank in Bahrain has to face?
- How does the bank insert cultural differences in a visual image or an advertisement? Which cultural aspects will be chosen?
- How does the bank transform the 'French message' and identity for the local culture? Does the bank keep its own cultural codes?
- What kind of paradoxes can we find in the communication media? Due to cultural differences, can a visual image deliver different messages (purposefully or unintentionally)?
- How can a company create equilibrium between the preservation of its cultural identity and the features of a foreign culture? Can the growth of an international culture challenge, delete or affect a unique local culture and its special characteristics? What are the risks of generating 'patterns'?

1.3 Purpose and significance of the study

This study particularly attracted my interest because the Middle East, and especially the Gulf countries such as Bahrain, are fairly new within the global economic system and play an important role in the worldwide economy. With the discovery of oil in Bahrain in 1932, the small kingdom witnessed an economic boom that allowed it to grow quickly. The discovery of oil and gas has increased the need for foreign workers force. Almost half of the population living in Bahrain are immigrants 'Bahrain has been under a constant pressure of immigrant cultures' (Karolak, 2009, p.1). Moreover, it was interesting to see within the country's cultural context how a foreign corporation, particularly a French bank, as Bahrain is the economic hub of the region, communicates visually.

Choosing the bank as a case study for this research is relevant as Bahrain is the economic hub of the region and competition in the financial arena is stiff. With its fast-growing economy, a colonial history, the attraction of foreign corporations for its resources and a significant influx of immigrants, Bahrain has become a country where traditional and Western cultures have mixed to create a cosmopolitan place. This cosmopolitan effect has resulted in tensions between a Westernised-style of life and the Bahraini's attachment to traditions and religion. These tensions appear at a crucial time in the country where the 'Arab Spring'¹ is still a sensitive matter and the population seems to be pulled between modernity, understood through Westernisation, secularisation and globalisation and the wish to reinforce their traditional culture and Islamic foundation.

As far as could be ascertained, no research has been done on the impact and interaction of the Bahraini culture on a foreign bank's corporate identity. Gaps within the theories (see literature review) can be outlined as most of the theories do little to link corporate identity with cross-cultural interaction. Thus, theorists on corporate identity tackled the notion of culture but from an internal and organisational perspective. Cross-cultural studies analyse cross-cultural impact and implications on a company's corporate visual identity or advertisement. However, most of this research has been limited to one element of corporate identity (logo or advertisement) and generally did not provide any case studies. Most research focused on American culture versus Asian culture (Korean, Malaysian, Chinese) and so have rarely provided studies on the Middle East and its cultural duality in relation to foreign multinationals.

1.4 Scope of the study

The present thesis aims to outline the cultural impact of national identity, religion, and other cultural elements within the BNP Paribas's communication media in Bahrain and its corporate identity. The idea is to understand the mechanism of cross culture within

¹ The 'Arab Spring' comes from a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests happening in the Arab world. In the case of Bahrain it has resulted in the population's demand for political changes based on the desire to have a constitutional monarchy (as it is for the moment an absolute monarchy ruled by the Sunni King family Al-Khalifa) and for better representation within the government of the Shia population. Bahrainis still protest against government corruption, absolute power and human rights violations. As a result of these demonstrations, the 'Arab Spring' has become a mainly communal problem between the Shia and the Sunni populations in Bahrain.

the BNP Paribas's communication media and identify how French European culture interacts with Bahraini Middle Eastern culture. The visual communication media of the bank analysed are defined as:

meanings embodied in symbols (...) by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life (Gwizdalski, 2009, p.4).

It is assumed that these visual communication media are the reflection of a certain cultural and social context and this thesis aims to look at how the different cultural factors and dimensions of the bank operate within a country ruled by Islam and the Arabic culture.

BNP Paribas is a French banking group, established on May 23, 2000 from the merger of Banque Nationale de Paris (BNP) and Paribas. BNP Paribas's activities are based on three core businesses: retail banking, investment banking and financial engineering (Investment Solutions).

The thesis enters within the scope of corporate communication, corporate identity; culture and cross-cultural communication. This study draws its references from the existing literature in the different areas of cultural and cross-cultural studies, corporate identity studies, national identities, and marketing in terms of branding and especially marketing related to Islam. In the context of the research, culture is understood as a complex notion that encompasses different human characteristics such as knowledge, beliefs, religion, law, morals, customs and other habits required in order to be part of the society. The concept of national identity is also closely looked at. According to Gwizdalski (2009, p.4) national cultures can be defined as 'particular ways of life; and intellectual and artistic human activities'. Because the thesis was limited within a time frame of an academic year, the scope of the research was restricted to exploring only the BNP Paribas's visual communication media that contribute in part to the bank's corporate identity in Bahrain. It was understood that most of the research on corporate identity and cross-cultural communication within multinationals only provides one aspect of culture and is focused solely on Asian countries or one type of communication media, usually advertisements. A case study approach was therefore followed and the study was conducted in Bahrain where the researcher had been a

trainee for three months within the communication department of the bank. The case study is formed through the collection of diverse data, such as BNP Paribas's visual communication media, including logo and branding as well as interviews with professionals. The case study is based on a theoretical background accompanied by semiotic and iconographic analysis of visuals combined with an analysis of the interviews. Limitations and boundaries need to be acknowledged as not everything can be covered. For example, not all aspects of internal communication (even if it is related to corporate identity) are studied, and all non-visual communication that is not directly part of the construction of the corporate identity will be ignored.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This chapter is concerned with providing an introduction to the topic of culture within a global context and in the scope of multinationals.

Chapter two gives a detailed literature review and identifies the different concepts that the thesis will tackle in terms of culture, cross culture, Islamic and French culture in regards to corporate identity. The chapter will try to fill the gap between the two main concepts of the thesis, corporate identity and cultural theories, in providing insights on how both concepts are related and impact on each other. The literature review will also detail national cultural specificities in both countries' political context and in regards to their potential impacts on diverse BNP Paribas's communication media.

Chapter three will provide on the methodology used to analyse the data. It will give an overview of the different methods used to construct the case study, discussing the potential limitations or strengths of each method.

Chapter four consists of detailed data analysis of the case study, and results of the visual communication media created by the BNP Paribas in Bahrain accompanied by the results and analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

Finally, the last chapter will discuss the results found in the preceding chapter and will propose a conclusion that identifies the limitations and recommendations of the present study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Identity within the cultural context.

2.1 Introduction

Culture and identity are both complex systems that encompass many different theories such as national culture, corporate identity, behavioural studies, intercultural and cross-cultural studies and many others. Culture is identity and identity is culture, they are artificially separated concepts but they are interrelated and maintain a close relationship. In order to understand the mechanism of identity and culture and more precisely the question of cultural differences within corporate identity, an overview of cultural theory, is presented to see how these theories may be linked or applied to the concept of identity and corporate identity.

2.2 Culture definitions

From a cross-cultural perspective, the term culture has often been analysed at an interpersonal level and then be applied to multinationals and management. Hofstede based his work on the impact of cross cultural behaviour on organisations. Forty years ago, he conducted a research study among employees of IBM to analyse the middle management interactions through reports on corporate culture in 76 countries. According to him, culture is 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from others' (1983, p.6). Culture is also 'that part of our conditioning that we share with other members of our nations, region, or group but not with members of other nations, regions or groups' (Hofstede, 1994 p.1, Hofstede, 1983, p.76). Within this definition, Hofstede tackles the concept of national identity as an important part of the construction of cultural identity. From these definitions, the author draws universal cultural dimensions that could be applied to multinationals in order to understand how cross-cultural behaviour operates within a business environment. The author identified five main universal cultural values. These five cultural dimensions operate all over the world and in both Eastern and Western cultures. With the identification of universal cultural concepts, Hofstede (1994) provided insights into five important cultural spheres that are: power distance,

power inequality, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term versus short-term orientation, which determines differences between cultures. However, in the past 40 years our relation to culture has changed. We are increasingly inclined to travel, and an increased migration flow has brought about the idea of a global citizen. Humans have witnessed a shift in cultural scale. Cultural aspects such as traditions and customs and the context of life evolve in regards to globalisation, greater access to new media, personal human experiences, political, economical contexts and access to other cultures. It is important to acknowledge that Hofstede takes an egocentric point of view and grounded his theory in the view that East and West are in binary opposition. However, East and West should be understood as cultural interaction and differentiation and not as opposites.

According to Tsui, Nifadkar and Ou (2007, p.429),

Culture is the 'patterns, explicit and implicit of and for behaviour, acquired and transmitted by symbols... The essential core of culture consists of tradition; ideas and especially their attached values; cultural systems may on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand as conditioning element of future actions.

This definition is quite close to Hofstede's (1983) as it also recognises cultural conditioning. Cultural conditioning is mostly driven by tradition, ideas and values that will have a direct impact on our actions, and therefore our actions are influenced by our cultural identity. Cultural identity could be pictured as a circle where conditioning is the result of the interrelationships between traditions, beliefs and actions. But, understanding the mechanisms of culture through conditioning alone implies the idea of cultural determinism and so misses the opportunity to look at the influence of other cultures on people and organisations.

Triandis (2001), and Triandis and Suh (2002) take a more general approach to culture. They look at culture within society and suggest that culture is 'to society what memory is to individuals' (p135). This definition suggests that culture is an inherent part of societies' construction. The authors mainly look at the cultural dimensions of collectivism versus individualism to analyse and understand cultural patterns across countries.

Hall and Hall (1990) have investigated the influence and impact of culture on our daily life. The authors propose theories on cross-cultural differences between Western and Eastern culture, defining cultural patterns that occur in the Eastern and Western worlds. The authors' works consists of translating behaviours from one culture to another. According to Hall and Hall (1990), cultures are extremely complex and 'culture is communication' (p3), emphasising the importance of non-verbal communication in cultures. Like Hofstede, Hall and Hall (1990) analysed the basic cultural patterns occurring in different countries. To investigate how these cultural patterns function the authors have introduced the theory of low-context culture and high-context culture to conceptualise differences between Western and Eastern cultures.

In contrast to cross-cultural studies, the GLOBE study (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour) took an organisational approach to understanding the impact of culture on leadership and organisations. GLOBE theory defines culture as:

shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and that are transmitted across age generation (Javidan, Stahl, Brodbeck & Wilderom, 2005, p.61; House, Quigley & De Luque, 2010, p.114).

According to these authors, there are two types of cultural manifestations: the 'what is or are' defined by the common behaviour adopted into a cultural context and the 'what should be', which represents feelings regarding cultural aspirations. The GLOBE study proposes nine core cultural dimensions to be analysed within different countries and within the organisational culture of multinationals. The nine cultural dimensions described by Javidan, et al. (2005) and House, et al. (2010) are similar to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, being: power distance, in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, future orientation, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, human orientation and performance orientation. Not all of these dimensions will be relevant to this research as they are not all relevant to the findings and data.

2.3 Cultural dimensions in relation to this research

Some of the cultural dimensions proposed by the various authors on cross-cultural studies were highlighted more than others in the data of this research. These cultural dimensions have been largely used by the different authors to describe cultural differences and have been proven to be relevant within this research.

Future orientation

According to authors such as Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), Hall and Hall (1990); and researchers on the GLOBE studies, Javidan, et al. (2005); House, et al. (2010), future orientation is an important cultural dimension that defines society's relationships and attitudes toward time. According to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), if we compare the American and French cultures on the future orientation dimension, we can see that they behave differently in regards to time. For instance, in contrast with Americans, it is said that the French emphasise the past more than the present or future. The GLOBE study researchers claim that countries that score highly on future orientation will focus on long-term success whereas a culture that has a low score on future orientation will attempt to live in the present, like Arab countries. It is interesting to note that most of the BNP Paribas's advertisements emphasise the idea of the future as an important value whereas for Middle Eastern Arabs, the concept of future is not understood or interpreted in the same way as the bank does. In fact, Arabs rarely think of the future as they tend to live in the present and do not think in terms of the future and long-term plans. The word 'inshalla' (God willing) often repeated within Arabic sentences captures this orientation well.

In-group and collectivist culture

Triandis (2001) developed a theory of cultural patterns applicable to the individualist versus collectivist cultural dimension in order to explain major cultural differences.

According to him, 'the individualism-collectivism cultural syndrome appears to be the most significant cultural difference among cultures' (Triandis, 2001, p.907).

Individualist culture,

fosters contractual relationships which are based on the principles of exchange. People calculate profit and loss before engaging in behaviour. Affect is missing in such relationships (Sinha & Verma, 1987, p.124).

People living in individualist societies tend to be autonomous and independent from others. Individualists will focus on independence, exploration, creativity and self-reliance, whereas collectivist societies are seen as societies in which concern for the well-being of others is important. People belonging to collectivist societies are likely to define themselves in regards to their peers; they are interdependent in groups and shape their behaviour and identity on the basis of in-group norms and rules. Collectivist cultures emphasise conformity, obedience, security and reliability (Triandis, 2001, p.912). However, we should not assume that people belonging to individualist societies carry all the characteristics described; it depends on the situation and context.

Collectivist societies will use indirect speech, using 'we' and 'face saving' is an important characteristic of these cultures. Where silence is uncomfortable for individualist cultures, it is a sign of strength and force in collectivist cultures. Also, within a communication context, people from collectivist cultures are shy in general when they join new groups, as opposed to individualist cultures, where people are not very shy and are generally skilled when dealing with superficial relationships (Triandis, 2001; Triandis & Suh, 2002). Moreover, within the cultural concepts of individualist versus collectivist cultures, Triandis (2001) identifies four degrees within individualist and collectivist cultures: vertical and horizontal individualism as well as vertical and horizontal collectivism. Vertical collectivism refers to people willing to sacrifice themselves for their in-groups. For example, in isolated societies where people live on small islands tend to be high in tightness (collectivist cultures) and, as a result, society gives harsh sanction for minor deviations. This is the case for Bahrain and most Arab Gulf countries. Bahrain is a small island where norms are very important and where

people depend on others. In such cultures, people have a clear feeling and sentiment as to what is acceptable or not regarding their behaviour, and are in agreement with what sanctions should be applied to people who do not behave appropriately.

But as Marinov (2007) states Middle Eastern countries such as Bahrain are becoming more Westernised and the younger section of the population tends to be more individualist in contrast to their elderly who are more attached to traditional and religious values.

On the other hand, a 'loose' culture refers to heterogeneous societies that open their frontiers such as France and other European countries. In these societies people do not depend on others and there is a higher tolerance for deviation.

The GLOBE study also identifies the dimension of in-group collectivism as an important feature to identify cultural differences. According to the theory, the in-group collectivism dimension refers to family, organisation and employment. Cultures with a high score on collectivism will strongly identify with their family and will emphasise the notion of pride within their organisation. For instance, Arab culture scores high on collectivism as family stands at the heart of the society. Arabs are very dependent on their family (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). This dimension is explicitly portrayed through the various BNP Paribas communication media. The analysis showed that the bank's strategy mostly employs in-group values (see Chapter 4 analysis figure 4.5, 4.6, 4.8, 4.10, 4.11 and TV Commercial).

Gender egalitarianism

Sexual segregation and the place of women and men within a workplace environment is a topic precious to the bank. The theme is undertaken within the bank's corporate social responsibility (CSR) and pictures within the BNP Paribas's CSR calendar display the importance of the topic especially in the Middle Eastern region. The CSR strategy mainly focuses on the empowerment of women within business. Gender egalitarianism is also an important dimension within cross-cultural studies. The GLOBE study published graphs on gender egalitarianism in various countries. They underlined important discrepancies in this area between France and the Middle East.

According to the study, these different dimensions can often be identified through the concept of national culture. Studying national culture and especially the Middle Eastern and Bahraini national culture provides interesting insights on the cultural mechanisms of the region and the country. The cultural mechanisms having been identified, the researcher will then be able to understand and describe the cultural dimensions, issues and processes portrayed and applicable to the case study.

2.4 National identity in crisis?

The French/European national identity

It is important to understand the French national identity as dependent on and independent from the European one. Since the conception of Europe, France has been defined (for economic reasons) as a country part of Europe and so is interpreted as a country that actively constitutes the European identity. According to Featherstone (1990, p2)

yet the conception of culture as having escaped the bounded nation state society also points to a limit, the image of the globe as a single place, the generative frame of unity within which diversity can take place.

On the one hand, the concept of 'national cultures' appears to be increasingly obsolete as globalisation leads to cultural convergence (Ladegaard, 2007). Globalisation includes the idea that we live in one world where cultural assimilation, integration and homogenisation prevailed.

Culture has become less and less a national consensus but a consensus built on common ethnic, generational, regional, ideological, occupation or gender-related interests, with and across national business (Ladegaard, 2007, p.141).

Featherstone (1990) claims that the dream of globalisation for France dates back to the French Revolution in 1789. The French Revolution was a source of major changes regarding the cultural image of socialism which was 'the dream of a global culture' (p4). Identity 'built on cultural distinctions seems to motivate battles for national

differentiation' (Shiller, 1994, p.1). In fact, globalisation involves the reconfiguration of states which results in 'the erosion of boundaries and the growth of cross-border and supra-territorial relations' (Pieterse, 2009, p.10). For example, the advent of the European Union was born from the idea of a modern country built to face the American and Asian economies and is based on a monolithic, unitary state with the desire to represent integrity and a coherent identity (Morley & Robins, 1995) whereas, the 'old Europe' was based on transnational empires governing different political and religions, and carried a mixed identity resulting from a 'complex circulation and permutation of ethnic, religious and linguistics groups' (Morley & Robins, 1995, p.24). Being European is a desire to have a strong identity with the feeling of belonging to a common Europe and an attempt to engineer a cultural identity. In today's society French identity has mostly been associated and analysed through the idea of a European identity.

European identity is imagined in terms of an idealised wholeness and plenitude [...] boundness and containment' (Morley & Robins 1995, p.19 and p.23).

In contrast to Featherstone's (1990) theory, it is argued here that a sense of national identity has compromised the idea of Europe as a uniform nation state. As a result, the spectre of nationalism has been deployed across Europe and many European countries strongly claim their differences and distinctiveness. The feeling of nationalism and national identity remains as powerful as before the creation of the European Union. In fact, the European Union has built its own national identity to face globalisation and super powers such as America and has consequently witnessed local attachment and rejection of the 'anonymous standardisation of global cultures' (Morley & Robins, 1995, p.22). Even though countries within Europe are very different in terms of cultures, traditions and national identity, the European Union brings the idea of union between those countries in order to construct its own national identity. What is external to this European identity has been considered as foreign. 'Globalisation emphasises on the idea of strangers or new barbarians' (Morley & Robins, 1995, p.24). For example, France has rejected the Americanisation of its products in recent years and a strong idea of a French cultural identity has come along with the idea of nationalism. France has seen the rise of FN (Front National: a political party) that bases

its ideas on national identity and the closing of borders to the rest of the world including Europe. This political party has taken more power and has gained legitimacy in the past few years as an answer in the fight against globalisation in terms of standardisation of products, the interdependency of European countries, and immigration. The FN is perceived as a threat to Europe and European durability and serenity. Moreover, having seen that the FN was a threat, the current Sarkozy government understood that national identity was an important topic for a major part of the French population and used it as a platform in the 2011/2012 campaign. The debate raised passion around the notion of identity and belonging and highlighted the divide in France on the idea of national identity. While President Sarkozy felt it was important to emphasise the concept of national identity, reassuring his constituents who felt swallowed up by Europe and the potential negative aspects of globalisation, his plan was not to disavow Europe. Yet France does have a double ambiguous position in regards to its belonging to the European identity while maintaining its attachment to its local culture.

The Middle Eastern regional Identity

It is crucial to understand Middle Eastern national identity in order to grasp the idea of Bahraini's cultural identity as compared to the French/European identity. Thus the purpose here is to provide a background as to how regional identity might impact on Bahraini's cultural patterns and identity, and so, implicitly, on the cultural identity mechanisms of the French/European bank's corporate communication media in Bahrain. It makes sense to look at the regional Middle East identity as Bahrain is part of the wider region and as some of the bank's communication media have been released in the region and not only in Bahrain. Bahrain-specific national identity will also be defined and analysed as well as gaps and issues that may impact on the bank's communication media and cultural representations.

As French identity is often analysed within the concept of European identity, Bahraini identity has also been understood through the Middle Eastern identity and more especially the Gulf countries' identity. As well as religion, national particularities have

determined the culture of the countries in the region (Marinov, 2007). Arab identity and Islam are closely connected since the majority of Arabs are Muslim (Seib, 2007).

Middle Eastern identity is difficult to define as it encompasses very diverse populations with different ethnicities, religions, cultures, languages and traditions. The Middle East cannot be seen as homogeneous but more as heterogeneous states where the concept of national identity cannot impose itself. The countries in the GLOBE Arabic cluster all share a heritage of foreign occupation for many decades (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). The difficulties for the Middle East in building a regional identity came from the fact that most of the states were never a single nation before previously due to their history of colonisation.

Bahrain passed subsequently through domination of Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Arabs, Portuguese and British. The latter controlled Bahrain until 1971 when Bahrain declared independence (Karolak, 2009, p.2).

Consequently, conflicts between East and West in the past and over the years have resulted from an inexorable division between the two cultures (Stewart, 2008).

‘More than three-quarters of a century after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire from which most of them emerged, these states have been unable to define, project, and maintain a national identity that is both inclusive and representative’ (Kumaraswamy, 2006, p.63).

For example, Bahrain is facing a crisis regarding its national identity today because almost half of its population are expatriates, mainly from Asian countries, and because of recent conflicts between Sunni and Shia arising from religious differences (different Islam currents). The fact that the Shia population is not represented in the government in terms of ethnicity and politics (the government is mainly constituted of Sunni Muslims and the country is ruled by the Sunni royal family) may jeopardise Bahrain’s national identity. However, the Middle East remains the largest region with an Islamic population unified by cultural traits such as religion and the Arabic language (Marinov, 2007).

With the exception of Turkey, all the countries in the Middle East have opted for a religio-centric identity. Islam is seen as the dominant identity of most Arab states (Kumaraswamy, 2006). However, it would be a mistake to define the national or regional identity in regards to this facet only. According to Kabasakal and Bodur (2002, p.44) 'the *Qu'ran* has been a dignifying force that strongly influences societal practices and acts as a driver towards creating a common culture in the Arabic cluster'. Islam is the most important facet in the Arab culture and in a Muslims' life, and Islam is a way of life (Kalliny & Ghanems, 2009; Nestorovic, 2009; Rice & Al Mossawi, 2002). The *Sharia (Islamic law)* proposes a clear policy governing all aspects of Muslim life such as duties, morals, behaviour, economics, justice, gender roles, individual freedoms, social obligations, trust, honesty, and many others. 'Religious beliefs are a constant reminder of what is considered culturally acceptable' (Kalliny & Ghanems, 2009, p.317). Islamic religion has a real impact on the Arabic and Bahraini culture where, in contrast, France originating from a strongly Catholic religion chose to be secular and not consider religion as a strong cultural influence.

The Gulf Cooperation Council countries which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, found that most of the population associated to these countries were united through their belief that Islam structures the daily life of people, and that the Gulf society and identity are inextricably interwoven with Islam (Rice & Al Mossawi, 2002). For example, public space in the region is mainly male oriented. Women are often required to enter it veiled or covered, respecting religious decency and appropriate relations between genders. 'Women work and shop under a male ethos and return to the female arena of the interior' (Streberny, 2001, p.114).

According to Marinov (2007, p.103) 'the overall culture of the Middle East is strongly embedded in the nomadic way of life and Islam'. Gulf countries and especially Bahrain are very old sates, constituted of Berber tribes with a long history of a nomadic lifestyle before colonisations. However, the increased standard of living brought by the discovery of oil in the region and in Bahrain (in 1932) has triggered a phenomenon of Westernisation that clashes with traditional Arab culture and Islam (Marinov, 2007). Moreover, in the context of decolonisation and the increasing number of sovereign

nation-states in the region, the political and economical system of Islamic Gulf states have begun to integrate the Western model of the world system (Mitchell & Marriage, 2003). Thus, the union of 'traditional' values with 'modern' values in Arab Gulf countries is often seen as a clash of civilisations between the Western and the Muslim world (Ouis, 2002). Islam, as a traditional religion, rules all aspects of a Muslim's life whereas Western civilisation is based on the concept of secularisation. An example of this clash would be given by the image of a Bedouin who overnight changes his camel for a Cadillac. Ouis (2002) defines the term modernity as a reference to progress, capitalism, rationalisation and bureaucratisation whereas Westernisation refers to secularisation, democratisation, consumerism, individualism, globalisation and liberalism. Traditional Arabs are often presented as a population that form a collective resistance to globalisation (Seib, 2007). Ouis (2002) claims that young people in Gulf countries have an ambiguous attitude toward the 'threat' of Westernisation. Islam is often seen as a religion rejecting modernisation and Western values. For instance, BNP Paribas's PowerPoint slide on Islamic banking (Najmah) confirms the desire of reinforcing regional/national identity through Islamic tenets. According to this PowerPoint slide Islamic banking is expanding in the region due to the desire for 'liberalisation from foreign dominances' (reference to colonisation and its effect on the concept of national identity); rejection of Western society and its economic model and a return to the fundamentals of Islam where Muslims wish to have a banking system according to their faith (Arab/Muslim pride).

Within the idea of modernisation and Western values, Ouis (2002) underlines the fact that modernity is often understood as the opposite of tradition. However, Islam is not an obscurantist religion as it can be perceived by some Westerners. Islam does accept modernisation in terms of infrastructure, modern science and technology but not modernisation, as some Westerners, especially the French understands it in terms of secularisation. Also, various expressions of traditions in the Middle East are interpreted as reactions against modernity in terms of a Westernised view of modernity, defined through concepts of secularisation, liberalism, globalisation and consumerism.

Therefore, Gulf countries have adapted themselves to the concepts of modernity as seen by Westerners and have tried to find a balance between these two notions in creating their own culture that is at the junction of tradition and modernity (Ouis, 2002). The Gulf States and other Islamic countries have implemented state systems representing a mixture of the modern and the traditional (Mitchell & Marriage, 2003). Such implementation can be seen in Bahrain's malls, architecture and lifestyle which are less conservative than other Gulf countries but are still trying to preserve traditional and Islamic culture.

According to Masud, Salvatore and Van Bruinessen (2009), tradition should not be understood as primordial but more as a dynamic ensemble of practices and arguments that secures social bonds and provides cohesion within communities. Therefore, tradition cannot be seen as the opposite of modernity. Modernisation understood in terms of infrastructure and technology advancement is largely accepted by the population living in the Gulf countries. Gulfies (inhabitants of Gulf countries) have a consumerist lifestyle while at the same time living in a society that values tradition and Islam. The youth living in the Gulf generally define their countries as both modern and traditional.

Islam is flexible enough to be interpreted as consistent with modern principles such as gender equality, development, modern technique, infrastructure, democracy without creating a culture alienation of Muslims in the process of globalisation (Ouis, 2002, p.332).

Bahraini national identity

Issues on the preservation of the Arab culture in Bahrain have been raised by many different political parties and the Bahraini parliament in recent years (Karolak, 2009; Fibiger, 2011). Some political parties, especially the opposition, have been concerned about the global cultural trend adopted by cultural institutions such as the Bahrain Museum, controlled by the political majority. These parties claimed that Bahraini culture was associated with the idea of a global culture and was therefore not representative of the cultural values of Islam and Bahrain. The protest about national identity came from the fact that Bahraini institutions were mostly promoting a global

culture. Thus, the dominant national cultural identity supported by the National Bahrain Museum Heritage Department is expressed and determined by the political necessity of promoting social unity. Exhibitions and other events organised by the museum have been described by the opposition (mainly representing the Shia communities) of what could be considered as not belonging to the Bahraini cultural heritage and have offended a certain number of people. As a result, the museum has been strongly criticised for not 'taking care of Bahraini values and for displaying and encouraging manners not in line with Bahrain's Islamic heritage and moral foundation' (Fibiger, 2011, p.187). This was a comment made after a female dance presentation during a New Year's Eve party. According to some parties², it is essential to 'be devoted to the preservation of cultural values firmly rooted in Bahrain's Islamic legacy' (Fibiger, 2011, p.188). As a result, dissenting opinions were expressed regarding the concept of the Bahraini national identity.

The Department of Directorate Heritage of the Bahrain Museum promoted a global culture that comes with the idea of unification through modernisation and the idea of cultural Westernisation. According to Fibiger (2011), this 'global heritage' is partly due to collaboration with Westerners and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to restore specific cultural heritage monuments and other exhibitions in Bahraini cultural life such as the restoration of the coastal fort Qala' at al-Bahrain.

This collaboration has formed a specific "regime of globalization", characterized by the relationship of political power in the Gulf and scientific power in the West' (Fibiger, 2011, p.189).

However, some Bahraini communities and political parties have strongly criticised this cultural globalisation strategy and refused to be associated with it as they do not consider that it honours and reflects the country's history and Islamic tenets.

² The purpose of the study is not to delve into political complexities but to provide a general overview of ongoing debates regarding Bahrain's national identity.

It is important here to underline this debate and these examples as they are representative of on-going tension in Bahrain in response to modernisations mostly defined through a modern economy, architecture and a young generation that tends to be westernised. These tensions also result from internal tensions between communities. In the past, Bahrain passed subsequently through domination by Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Arabs, Portuguese and the British. As a result, Bahrain has been a melting pot of nationalities, languages, cultures and traditions that put into jeopardy the cultural heritage and concept of a national identity within the kingdom (Karolak, 2009). In fact, almost half of the present population are expatriates (mostly from Asian countries) and so it seems to be an issue and a challenge for Bahrain to keep its traditions and perpetuate a certain historical cultural heritage as the country works towards the idea of unification through the concept of cultural globalisation. The effort of promoting global culture within the country can be explained by the reality of an expatriate population which lives in areas populated by fellow expatriates who tend to promote their own cultural identity (Karolak, 2009). Concerns about the West's cultural domination in the region and its influence on religion, languages and cultural orientation are growing (Streberny, 2001). As a result, in September 2005, Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak al-Khalifa of Bahrain urged the need to safeguard Iraq's 'Arabic-Islamic identity so that Iraq can remain an active member of the Arab and Islamic environment' (Khaleej Times, September 7, 2005).

In 2009, discussions on whether to blame the Asian workforce for the loss of cultural identity or not, were replaced by law proposals. The Bahraini Labour Minister Majeed Al-Alawi and the Bahraini National Assembly called for the need to preserve the kingdom's identity and created heated debate within the country's media. The Bahraini Parliament proposed laws that aimed to promote the use of Arabic to transmit national identity to the population. Thus, the use of Arabic within institutions such as hospitals and tribunals has been made compulsory to oblige foreigners to learn Arabic and to reduce the importance of English (Karolak, 2009). Other laws such as restricting alcohol, cigarettes and pork (considered as a source of alienation of the younger generation) have been aborted as they were considered as dangerous and restraining economic freedom and development.

Surprisingly, religion does not play an important part in the construction of the Bahrain cultural heritage in the museum. The Islamic religion is not displayed as a major cultural element, part of the Bahraini cultural heritage, in order to avoid reminiscence of the tensions between Sunni and Shia communities that took place in the country over recent decades. As a result, Islam is taken aside as it is not totally included in the social and public sphere. Islam is not exposed as a mainstream cultural element within the museum within the Bahraini cultural history as it should be, according to parliament and some communities (Fibiger, 2011). This is interesting as it shows a gap between the importance of religion within the formation of the national identity and how it has been practised and portrayed in Bahrain by cultural institutions such as the museum.

This comes as a paradox when, Kumaraswamy (2006) and Marinov (2007), state that the strongest identity represented in Bahrain is the Islamic religion. Islam still plays an important role in the public and private sphere. Bahrain recognised Islam as the official religion and its jurisprudence is based on the Islamic Sharia states. According to Karolak (2009 p.9) 'preserving local culture and traditions is closely linked to Islam'. A number of Middle East states like Bahrain apply the Sharia's ethics and law to their politics, economies and all other social aspects of their daily life (Kumaraswamy, 2006; Marinov, 2007). Where the corporate and private spheres emphasise Islamic practices, the representation of religion is not so obvious within the cultural promotion of Bahrain through some institutions such as the museum.

Another important issue within the Muslim community in regards to the national identity is that 70% of the population in Bahrain is Shia, but the 30% Sunni population control Bahrain and are the political leaders (e.g. the Al-Khalifa family). The Al-Khalifa family is not representative of the majority population which has created considerable tensions and has provoked political and cultural instability. This would explain the reluctance of cultural institutions to represent Bahraini religious cultural heritage as a way of avoiding any sensitive reactions and resurgence of religious tensions between these Muslim communities.

The issue between Bahraini's Shia and Sunni has become increasingly important over the years as the government have proceeded to naturalise foreign citizens into the

Sunni community to create a balance (Karolak, 2009). This cultural tension may impact on the bank's cultural representations and could present a challenge to overcome because this foreign bank has had to adapt its communications to a cultural heritage in crisis and so has to find a balance between the discrepancies occurring between the population's ideas of culture, the actual Bahraini culture and the bank's French/European original culture. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that BNP Paribas has been actively participating in restoring some monuments that are parts of Bahrain's cultural heritage. The bank participated and sponsored the renovation of the oldest Bahraini's houses and worked closely with the cultural department of the museum to contribute to preserving the country's cultural heritage. BNP Paribas also organised alcohol-free events in the museum in order to adhere to Islam. Thus, Islam and the *Sharia* law are not as isolated as suggested by Fibiger (2011). Islam remains important within the practice and the public sphere and within the museum's space.

Many views have been raised as to how the cultural heritage of Bahrain best be presented and defined; 'within the government there are various ideas as to how Bahrain should brand itself locally and internationally' (Fibiger, 2011, p.194). The difficulties in finding a consensus pose a challenge in defining Bahrain's cultural and national identity. Tensions between the idea of adhering to a global cultural heritage and a Westernised lifestyle highlight the importance of preserving the local traditional Bahraini culture. It is not possible to deny the influence of national identity and culture on corporate identity, thus, the concept of corporate identity in regards to the challenges of culture is introduced.

2.5 Corporate identity and culture

Corporate identity theory and definition

Corporate identity is a broad area analysed in many different fields of studies such as marketing, communication, advertising, management and public relations. Within competitive markets, corporations have to distinguish themselves and need to develop a strong identity in order to face this competition, and be successful and recognisable.

Corporate identity is a crucial element of the strategic dimension of an organisation and its cultural environment. In fact, the link between organisational and national culture within corporate identity studies has been too little studied. The idea of culture within corporate identity has been addressed from an internal perspective through the concept of organisational identity. Theories on corporate identity that focus on the internal aspect of culture often miss an opportunity to address the impact of national culture on an organisation's identity. As a result, this research will focus on the external attributes of a corporate identity and the idea of national culture and how the latter impacts on corporate identity.

The most suitable theory of corporate identity for this research will come mainly from Balmer's (1998, 2001 & 2002) work and from the marketing perspective. Balmer distinguishes three major strands that constitute corporate identity: corporate identity, which refers to external communication; organisational identity referring to internal communication and corporate visual identity which is often associated with the visible external attributes of an organisation. All these three concepts are derived from what he calls 'business identity'. Most of the researchers on corporate identity (Argenti, 2007; Argenti & Forman, 2002; Cornelissen, 2011; He & Balmer, 2007; Balmer & Gray, 1998; Belasen, 2008; Balmer & Greyser, 2002; Bick, Jacobson & Abratt, 2003; Christensen & Askegaard 2001; Dowling, 2001; Fill, 2005; Hatch & Schultz, 1997, 2003; Melewar, 2008; Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007) have tried to draw boundaries between internal identity, external identity and the visual identity. In reality, these boundaries are blurred and most of the time artificially separated. Many concepts within corporate identity overlap and so corporate identity theories appear to be quite complex. However, because this research does not investigate any features of internal identity aspects, but only external aspects and more specifically the visual identity, I will not dwell on internal concepts of internal corporate identity.

The most common definition of corporate identity is: 'the representation of the reality of the company or 'what an organisation is' and 'who a company is' (Alessandri, 2001; Balmer & Grey, 1998; He & Balmer, 2007; Lambert, 1989; Barnett, Jermier & Lafferty, 2006). Cornelissen (2011) claims that corporate identity should emerge from an understanding of the organisation's core mission, strategic vision, and culture in general.

The 'company's' identity is the concrete, often visual manifestation of its reality, including names, brands, symbols, self-presentation, corporate sponsorship, and most significantly your company's vision. (Argenti & Forman, 2002, p.68)

The main reasons for managing corporate identity is to make clear to all stakeholders the values and beliefs of an organisation (Fill, 2005).

According to Balmer and Greyser (2002) and Balmer and Haslam (2007) an organisation retains multiple identities that might be the result of an organisation's structure, design, culture, beliefs, tradition, history, philosophy among other things. Thus, it is significant to study the cultural aspects that may impact on the corporations different identities. In fact, in the context of this research, multiple identities carried by a company seem to be highlighted by cultural differences. It is then possible to find within the BNP Paribas's case study multiple identities within the bank's communication media as a result of cultural adaptation and cultural differences between the bank's country of origin and the countries in which the bank operates. The diverse identities that a company serves will, in this case, mainly be studied through cultural influences. Balmer and Greyser (2002) and Balmer and Haslam (2007) distinguish five different corporate identities: the 'actual identity' which represents the current attributes of an organisation; the 'communicated identity' referring to a controlled identity, the 'conceived identity' which refers to perceptual concepts; the 'ideal identity' which is what the corporation deems as a perfect identity to have; and finally the 'desired identity', the one that the organisation would like to adopt. Because an organisation serves varied audiences it has to adopt multiple identities (Balmer & Greyser, 2002; Christensen & Askegaard, 2001). In order to provide strong communication and identity it is important to align, and to be aware of, corporate multiple identities. In the case of the BNP Paribas, the research will mainly focus on the 'communicated identity' and the 'actual identity' in relation to culture.

Corporate Identity and CVI concepts

Because the focus of this research will mainly be on the BNP Paribas's corporate visual identity (CVI), it is essential to provide a theoretical background regarding this notion.

CVI was first analysed as the main component of early theories of corporate identity. Corporate identity was defined and mainly understood through the company's design, more specifically through the company's names and logos (Lambert, 1989; Cornelissen, 2011, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007; Kim & Hatcher, 2009). As a result, many articles (Hynes, 2009; Melewar, Saunders & Balmer, 2001; Pittard, Ewing & Jevons, 2007; Van Riel, Van Den Ban & Heijmas, 2001; Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007; Borgerson, Schoveder, Magusson & Magusson, 2009; Van Den Bosh et al. 2005) have proceeded to analyse a corporate CVI through the company's logos, and thus a corporate logo has become an important characteristic and tool largely used to understand corporate identity. According to Melewar, Saunders and Balmer (2001) and Nam, Kim, Kwon and Kang (2009) the CVI system is mainly understood as a manifestation of the corporate name, symbol, typography, colour and slogan. It is easy then to define the CVI as a tool that covers the visible components of a corporate identity.

CVI is the most visible element of corporate strategy, as well as the single element most representative of a company's image (Nam, Kim, Kwon & Kang, 2009, p3).

Therefore, even though, initially, corporate identity concepts were reduced to the logo and other type of design the notion became gradually representative of other forms of communications such as corporate advertising and sponsorship that played a major role in the implementation of corporate identity concepts (Cornelissen, 2011).

'the concept of corporate identity grew out of a preoccupation in the design and communication communities with the way in which organisations present themselves to external audiences' (Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007, p.6).

But it is argued here that CVI cannot be simply reduced to the logo of a company but should be defined as a representation of the core mission and strategic vision of a company that encompasses symbols, and powerful cultural values developed in regards to the firm's environment. CVI is then a visual system representing corporate history, culture, strategy and structure (Van Den Bosh et al. 2005; 2006). Thus, CVI is seen as a reflection of organisational values, ambitions or beliefs and is a key function

in the organisation's depiction to stakeholders and shareholders. CVI is then the reflection of the corporate identity.

CVI is the articulation of the organisation, what it stands for, what it does and how it goes about its business; especially the way it relates to its stakeholders and the environment (Nam, Kim, Kwon & Kang, 2009, p.4).

The reason multinationals develop CVIs is to be able to differentiate themselves from others in order to create a distinctive image of the corporation to different stakeholders. CVI's role is to respond to a competitive environment, facilitating sales, creating an attractive environment for hiring employees and finally to increase the company's stature and presence (Melewar, Saunders & Balmer, 2001). This statement supports the system theory perspective based on the need for an organisation to adjust its identity to its environment.

According to Van Den Bosh et al. (2006), CVI carries four functions: recognisability (notion of remembering), reputation; a weak visual identity may be a symptom of corporate malaise, the structure of an organisation expressed to the external audiences and the identification of the employees with the organisation. CVI should offer the possibilities for shareholders, stakeholders and the audience to associate the visuals to the organisation's values and so to create the corporate image.

Corporate identity practitioners, who aim to communicate consistent and clear messages, should operate within a sign system that offer a variety of image of their organisation and which is open to multiple interpretations (Nam, Kim, Kwon & Kang, 2009, p.4).

CVI helps in establishing and maintaining the organisation's corporate image (Hynes, 2009). This is the reason why a CVI must be adapted to the cultural requirements of the country where it operates in order to guarantee the right image, reputation and to build a strong identity.

Cultural impacts on CVI

With the internationalisation of the market, and standardisation, the impact of globalisation on corporate identity is an important debate among researchers on communication and marketing. Many of them (e.g. Melewar, Basset & Simoes, 2006; Jun & Lee, 2007) agree that it is important for a multinational to adapt to the local culture and to certain markets in order to be effective. Therefore, we cannot deny our exposure to global media and advertisements. Globalisation as a communication strategy may result in the homogenisation of cultures but it is also argued that despite our exposure to globalisation, culture cannot be homogenised. According to Featherstone, Lash and Robertson (1995) globalisation is the result of global inputs including local traditions. In fact, consumers will respond positively to advertisements fitting in with cultural values (Gram, 2007). A multinational should represent the local culture and the cultural values of the country in which they operate. An attempt to adapt culturally should be seen in an organisation's execution of their marketing and communication strategies so that they can be effective and persuasive in their marketing effort and adapt to environmental pressure as the system theory suggests.

A multinational has multiple organisational cultures due to having employees from different cultural backgrounds or subcultures associated with different functionalities or geography (Wilson, 2001). Thus, it is important to take into consideration all cultural layers that constitute an organisation and a country to provide an accurate marketing tool and a coherent corporate identity. However, today's corporate tend to adopt a standardisation strategy within their CVI and brand management department. The standardisation trend is much preferred by companies as a tool for economic profit and to build a general and global identity that can be read and recognised all over the world. According to Ahangar (2009, p.208), 'dynamic standardisation remains limited but applicable within specific cultural country markets'. Thus, standardised visuals have become increasingly popular in order to allow consumers across countries to read a picture (Callow & Shiffman, 2002). In other words, multinationals adopt a standardised CVI system to facilitate the sale of products and services and to create an attractive environment for hiring employees. Likewise, multinationals have the opportunity through standardisation to promote a global image (Melewar, Saunders & Balmer, 2001). However, like other theories, possible negative effects of standardisation on corporate identity are not sufficiently addressed. Standardised

images do not always convey uniform meanings across countries (Callow & Shiffman, 2002).

In addition, standardisation appears to be used much more in Western countries than in non-Western countries (Polegato & Bjerke, 2009). According to Bu, Kim and Lee (2009), this convergence can be explained by the fact that the gap between Western and Eastern cultures in visual forms narrows and the direction of this convergence is more from Western to Eastern. The authors claim an admiration of the Eastern cultures for Western cultures and so take it as a model. As a result, global advertising tends to show white models and Western values. Advertising presenting foreigners can be seen as exotic and so will interest readers. This advertising responds to Eastern desires for Western lifestyles. The success does not come from the fact that it is universal but the fact that it does portray Western values, which fascinates a section of the Eastern population (Gram, 2007). However, this suggestion may have to be qualified. Recently the world is witnessing a trend of a reinforcement of the Eastern cultural identity. Contrary to the above-mentioned authors, a re-identification of Eastern cultures as a potential future model in the world is possible. Eastern cultures have become increasingly powerful as a result of an economic growth over the last few years and they are very proud of their cultural heritage.

Eastern advertising, fragments of both Eastern and Western values co-exist with a tendency of a Western domination, but possibly with tendencies of growth in Eastern values and at least a selective use of Western values by Eastern marketers (Gram, 2007, p.298).

An example of the standardisation of CVI is seen in the Benetton Company that adopted an internationalisation strategy for their advertising campaigns as a marketing strategy in order to be recognised and visible in different cultures and countries. Their campaign representing a black African woman breast-feeding a Caucasian baby was published in Vogue in 1980 and has been read and known all over the world and caused major controversy. This advertising campaign gave Benetton the chance for its corporate identity message to be successfully conveyed to international audiences (Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007). After these advertising campaigns, Benetton changed its

strategy and has opted for local campaigns in order to avoid miscommunication that occurred during their international advertising campaigns (Niskanen, 1999). Thus, Benetton aligned itself with the tradition of firms that choose to 'brand globally but advertise locally' (Polegato & Bjerke, 2009, p.385). The authors suggested that Benetton's likeability significantly differed in the use of symbolic and visual appeals between various European countries, for example, France used more physical visuals. Overall, it seems that companies adopt a 'global' approach which varies according to the country of origin and the industry. This approach is similar to BNP Paribas's latest campaigns that respond to the idea of 'act globally, think locally', creating a global culture easy to 'read' across cultures. However, it has been noticed that for websites, visitors were willing to spend more time and money if the website was translated into their native languages (Hallibuton & Ziegfeld, 2009).

To understand the impact of culture on corporate identity various articles that investigate Eastern and Western cultural differences in corporate identity and more specifically in CVI were reviewed. Many articles have addressed cultural differences between the United States of America (USA) and Korea or the Philippines. Culture appears a powerful concept that shapes motivation, lifestyles and product choices (Ahangar, 2009). To understand these cultural differences, the articles have focussed on various cultural model measurements inspired by the cultural dimensions proposed by cross-cultural studies. For instance, Callow and Schiffman (2002) focused on print advertisement differences between the USA and the Philippines. They found that consumers from a high-context culture are more capable than those from a low-context culture to derive implicit meanings from visual images in print advertisement. In fact, people raised in a particular culture will rely on to a specific cultural value system, beliefs and perception processes (Gram, 2007).

Contextual background is essential in order to measure the cultural effectiveness of visual advertising campaigns. As a result, print advertisements for low-context cultures should be more transparent and should use direct forms of communication such as verbal forms. On the other hand, high-context cultures are more comfortable with hidden meanings and metaphors. Hence, a complex visual design is more appropriate for them because there is a risk in over-reading if it is a simple image. What is

regrettable, though, is the lack of details and explanations of both countries' cultural background. In fact to understand how the CVI of a foreign company works, it is essential to know, analyse and be aware of the cultural background of the country in which the company operates. To illustrate these theories, of Eastern culture using more complex and abstract messages than Western cultures, Jun and Lee (2007) found that Korean logos tend to be more abstract than those from the USA. The authors based their research on Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (1998) cultural variation model of 'diffuse versus specific'. It seems that the Korean culture can be defined as diffuse whereas American culture is regarded as more specific. In their taglines Korean logos contain more symbolism and values than the American ones. The article underlines important cultural differences that exist between both cultures and so highlights cross-cultural theories. But, the authors did not investigate or define which types of logo were the most effective and they did not directly link the impact of these cultural differences to corporate identity.

Bu, Kim and Lee (2009) have an opposing view. According to them, culture has little effect on visual forms in advertising. They conducted research on the impact of culture on visual forms in advertising, using the same cultural model of 'diffuse versus specific'. Their results showed a higher use of indirect form in Korea but overall they found that both countries adopt significantly more direct forms of visuals.

In addition, the theory of the divine proportion claims that there are universal aesthetic preferences across all cultures. In other words, there is a cross-cultural aesthetic preference for the 'divine proportion' (Pittard, Ewing & Jevons, 2007). The divine proportion theory is based on a mathematical calculus that describes the perfect symmetry and aesthetic of an image. Thus, the 'divine proportion' is universal and appreciated by all cultures in the same way. The 'divine proportion' could be defined through or could correspond to waves, flowers, stars and other universal signs. In fact, the simpler the logo is, the more effective it will be (Pittard, Ewing & Jevons, 2007). As a result, on the scale of high-context culture and low-context culture or diffuse versus specific, it is possible to find a junction where all cultures can find a common ground.

Risk of cross cultural miscommunication within CVI

Despite a possible universal junction between cultures, cultural differences across countries remain. In their article Hall and Hall (1990) address possible miscommunication or misinterpretation across cultures and behaviours. For example, because the French are much higher on the high-context culture scale than the Americans, the use of first names in USA can offend the French. This is also linked to the cultural value and dimension of power distance. Thus, the French use formal forms of address waiting for the other person to indicate when familiarity is acceptable.

Many miscommunications can occur in corporate identity strategies and CVIs when they act across cultures. For instance, the Benetton Company is very famous for its controversial advertisement campaigns. They have offended many cultures through their shocking advertising all over the world. The advertisement of a black African woman breast-feeding a Caucasian child offended the African-American communities in the USA because it reminded them of the age of slavery rather than supporting racial harmony. Another example was the death row campaigns that offended American citizens while Europeans were not offended. As a result, Benetton often miscalculated the climate between Europe and America on the different perceptions that cultures can have on such topics (Magala, 2003; Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007).

Miscommunication is a threat to the corporate identity and the organisation's market position. For instance, *Ovon Savon* Company that operates in South California saw its sales significantly decrease because of cultural difference and more particularly because of linguistic cultural misinterpretation. The organisation encountered a linguistic cultural adaptation problem of one of their product sales in Mexico and other Hispanic countries. The name of the product 'Asco' meant 'sickening' in Spanish which did not send a positive image to the consumers of the brand (Balmer & Gray, 1998).

Another example that points to issues of miscommunication between Arabs and Westerners was for a brand of cigarettes. The brand 'Silk Cut' had been trying to use its global advertisements in the Saudi market. Consumer panels reacted very negatively as the purple colour used in advertisements represented death for Arabs, and the

advertising picture was perceived as violent. As a result, purple Silk Cut brand advertising was never launched in Saudi Arabia (Melewar, Turnbull & Balabanis, 2000). It is essential to take into consideration cultural differences in order to avoid any possible miscommunication that could affect a company's reputation, image and identity. Corporate identity managers must be sensitive to linguistic and cultural factors (Schmitt 1995). BNP Paribas has made important adaptations to its communication media such as their 'Keep Reaching' global campaign in Bahrain having to remove the original taglines in order to avoid miscommunication.

2.6 Impacts of Culture and Islam on corporate identity

Organisations in the Islamic market

In order to understand how BNP Paribas adapts its communication media to the Islamic/local market as well as take into consideration potential impact of national culture and identity, it is essential to understand the specific requirements for businesses that wish to operate in these markets.

The primary source of Islamic law is the Qu'ran, the Holy Book that was given by Allah (God) to the prophet Muhammad (Marinov, 2007). Economic, business and all other activities of life are governed by the Qu'ran. An increasing number of Muslims want to contribute to the global marketplace in ways that will respect Islamic religious law. These developments suggest that religion may also play an important role in the effectiveness of some marketing communication strategies targeted at Muslims (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002).

The Qu'ran defines all aspects of a Muslim's life as well as the activities categorised as lawful (*halal*) or prohibited (*haram*), and so marketing and communication professionals should take into consideration the impact of Islam in their communication media. Nothing is *haram* except what is specifically prohibited in the Qur'an or in a clearly authenticated, explicit *sunnah* (Qu'ran verses) (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002). In the Islamic religion, eating pork, or carnivorous animals, or animals

with fangs and blood, gambling and more generally games of chance, drinking alcohol, nudity and idol worship are prohibited by the *Sharia* (Chachula et al. 2009). Thus, marketers should avoid the use of statues and busts in their advertising and other communication media as it is perceived as a form of idolatry. Marketers and communication professionals should also emphasise the potential opportunities to develop non-alcoholic items and beverages such as soft drinks and fruit juices (Melewar, Turnbull & Balabanis, 2000).

According to Nestorovic (2009), the *Sharia* prescribes five orders to be followed daily and that could be useful to be aware of when working in marketing and communication in Islamic markets. Thus, the rules are: what is prescribed, what is recommended, what is admissible, what should be avoided and what is forbidden.

Islam is a religion based on the five pillars (*Djihad*) fundamental to the life of a Muslim. These pillars are: belief in one, unique God, Allah and in the Prophet Muhammad (*Iman*); declaration of faith; daily prayers (*Salah*) (five times a day); giving money to charity, the needy and poor (*Zakat*); auto-purification through fasting through Ramadan (*Saoum*); and the pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim once in their life should accomplish (*Hadi*) (Nestorovic, 2009; Chachula, et al. 2009)

In relation to this, Marinov (2007) and Niazi (1996) claim that Islamic marketing principles are based on two pillars: the submission to the moral authority of God and empathy with and mercifulness to God's creations. Thus, unethical or harmful actions are strictly forbidden. Ethical practice is a very important notion within Islamic marketing. Moreover, religious beliefs are often taken as the starting point in consumer segmentation (Marinov, 2007, p.105). In that sense, the pillars can be a marketing and communication tool for Islamic products and many advertisements use symbols to represent these pillars (Nestorovic, 2009).

Other fundamental Islamic concepts and aspects of Islamic culture that should be taken into consideration in corporate communication include concepts such as unity and legitimacy. The unity of the Muslim community and unity with God came from the necessity to create harmony. The consequence in marketing is the loyalty to one

product brand. Legitimacy includes the idea of trust within business and products transaction resulting in the creation of Islamic services (Islamic banking etc).

Islamic Banking

Banking and other financial institutions in Islamic nations base their activities and business on Islamic precepts and principles (Marinov, 2007). The recent growth of Islamic banking and finance worldwide has increased the influence of Islam on various business activities. For example, Citibank, Calyon and BNP Paribas (Najmah) have Islamic banking departments headquartered in Bahrain (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002). Islamic business tends to be more ethical than non-Islamic banking as the *Sharia* provides a set of moral principles to follow. Thus, Islamic banks' purposes are to prevent moral failures and injustices (Kuran, 2004). Islam provides a paradigmatic structure of business ethics established on the principles of unity, free choice, responsibility, justice, trust and honesty, according to Anas (2009).

Foreign companies that wish to enter into the Islamic market need to adapt themselves to the specificities of the Islamic market. Companies that follow the Islamic law (*Sharia*) and economic precepts have to respect the following statement:

Resources of all types are gifts from God and must be used in the most efficient productive way to fulfil plan of mankind and satisfy individual needs. Principles based on trust rather than self-interest; economic activities must serve the interest of all in society; Sharia law forbids the manufacture of alcoholic drinks, pork, usury, gambling, gray market activities, deceitful transactions, hoarding and any other activities that can cause harm to people. Any earnings or benefits derived from activities that do not follow the Islamic principles are illegal; business transactions must be based on cooperation, not opposition and confrontation; under the Sharia law, Muslim individuals who accumulate wealth above a fixed level (nisab) are obliged to redistribute through a tax (Zakat) a certain amount to the poor; and the Sharia law forbids the charging of interest on all types of credit which makes Islamic banking business very different from the basis of Western banks (Marinov, 2007, p.3; Nestorovic, 2009).

In Islam, business activity is considered to be a socially useful function. In fact, Prophet Muhammad was involved in trading for much of his life. The Islamic socio-economic system includes detailed coverage of specific economic variables such as interest,

taxation, circulation of wealth, fair trading, and consumption (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002, p.5). The establishment of the first Islamic bank to offer a range of commercial services opened in Dubai in 1975. Because of the economic 'boom' and the increase in petrol prices in 2007 and 2008, more banks operating in the Middle East proposed Islamic services such as products that help customers to calculate the *Zakat*, manage the *saddaqa* (charity), and the *quard-hassan* (benevolent loans funds) (Nestorovic, 2009; Haniffa & Husaib, 2007). According to Haniffa and Hudaib (2007), there are today more than 200 Islamic financial institutions operating in 23 countries with more than US\$200 billion in deposits, and bankers estimate that the market is growing by at least 15% a year.

According to Islam, the bank's main characteristic is its ethical identity based on the fact that its business philosophy is closely related to religious beliefs. Consequently, Islamic banks represent a new wave of corporations where social goals are as important as making a profit (Haniffa & Hudaib, 2007). Islamic banking has to respect the following *Sharia* precepts: it must never exploit people as Islam does not recognise money as merchandise, money should be used only for exchange purposes. Business is not only an activity made for financial profit alone but also an activity to attain the essence of humanity (Anas, 2009).

In theory, Islamic banks accept only two types of deposits: transaction deposits risk free and investment deposits (Kuran, 2004).

Interest is prohibited in Islam, not commerce. According to Kuran (2004, p.8):

Interests inculcate love for money and the desire to accumulate wealth for its own sake [...] it transfers wealth from the poor to the rich, increasing the inequality in the distribution of wealth. It also turns people away from productive enterprise.

Moreover, Islamic banks do not speculate, or undertake excessive risks (*gharar*) such as investments in futures markets as it is against Islam and *Sharia* precepts (Nestorovic, 2009; Haniffa & Husaib, 2007; Brack, 2008). It is also interesting to note that during Ramadan, the products most promoted are banking services.

The following five distinctive features differentiate a conventional bank from an Islamic bank: the underlying philosophy and values; provision of interest-free products and services, restriction to Islamically acceptable deals, focus on development, social goals and social responsibility which is an important aspect within Islam, and subjection to additional reviews by the *Sharia* Supervisory Board. These main features make the link between Islamic finance and ethics (Haniffa & Hudaib, 2007). Islamic banks are the safe keepers of deposits and shareholders' savings and capital, and they make sure that these funds will be used in a good and ethical manner. The provision of interest free services differs from conventional bank practices. The interest-based (*Riba*) practice of conventional banking is forbidden in Islamic banking. As a result, Islamic banking has developed the profit and loss sharing principle and the mark-up principle (Haniffa & Hudaib, 2007). Islamic banking offers much more than the products and services described; they also finance projects and activities respecting Islam and avoid any financing or products considered as not permissible by the religion such as casinos or alcohol-producing companies. Islamic banks are innovative in the way they deal with products and services that have to be *Sharia* compliant and thus respect Islamic law and Islamic values, tradition and the wider culture (Brack, 2008).

According to Haniffa and Hudaib (2007), Islamic banks should communicate the following: that they are banks respecting Islamic law and so will not have any involvement in non-permissible (*haram*) activities. BNP Paribas Islamic banking, Najmah, for example, emphasises its *Sharia* board as proof of non-involvement in *haram* products. Islamic banks also tend to use religious terminology within their communication media to stress the fact that they are *Sharia* compliant and do not use or promote any unlawful financial products (Chachula et al 2009).

2.7 The Arabic culture

The Arab Communication style

Communication has been an instrumental and integral part of Islam since its inception as a religio-political movement. Islamic civilisation has been associated with a high level of oral communication.

The art of oral communication in Islam derived its origins from the Koran more precisely from Sunnah (tradition) and Hadith (sayings of the prophets).’ (Mitchell & Marriage, 2003, p.312; Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002).

There are also several basic rights of communication in Islam.

the right to know; the right to read (Igra), the right to write (Ghalam), the right to speak (Khutbah), the right of knowledge (Ilm), the right to consult (Shoura), the right to disseminate (Tablish), and the right to travel (Hijrah) (Mitchell and Marriage, 2003, p.312).

As it has been mentioned before, Arabs value honour and honesty, respect for parents and elders and loyalty (Feghali, 1997; Kavoossi, 2000; Kalliny & Ghanems, 2009; Hofstede, 1994; Nostorovic, 2009; Triandis, 2001). Thus, the prevalent cultural values in Arab societies are endurance and rectitude, loyalty and dignity, generosity, courage and self-respect, pride, rivalry and revenge (Feghali, 1997, p.351).

Following Hofstede’s theory on cross culture, Feghali (1997) proposes an analysis of the six fundamental values (collectivism, hospitality, honour, indirectness, elaborateness and affectiveness) that define Arabic communication patterns.

Firstly, as it has been stated before, the Arabic culture is mainly defined through the concept of collectivism. They have a high feeling of affiliation and mutual dependence and they also carry a high sense of loyalty to family and ‘communal cohesion’ (Feghali, 1997, p.352; Kalliny & Ghanems, 2009). In Arabic society, family background and social class define personal status. Communication in Arab countries should stress honesty, kindness and directness (Chachula et al. 2009; Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002). Muslims’ obligations towards family and tribal traditions are very important and explain the preferred communication within the Arab region which is the oral and relationship-based communication. Also, because respect towards parents and the elderly is an

important dimension within Islam, there is a predominance of elderly and parental figures portrayed in advertising (Nestorovic, 2009).

Hospitality is another very important value within the Arab culture. 'To a foreigner the Arabs' outstanding trait may well be hospitality' (Feghali, 1997, p.353). The idea of hospitality comes from the *Zakat* which translates into the duty of giving money to the poor or needy, especially during Ramadan.

Equally important is honour, 'a controlling value legitimating the family structure and the modesty code required of both men and women' (Feghali, 1997, p.354). For instance, men ensure the honour of the family and their wife by maintaining a 'chaste reputation'. It is worthwhile noting that reports of honour crimes are still published in the Middle Eastern media and a woman that commits adultery will be subjected to physical or death punishment while these crimes are often falsely and regrettably associated with Islam. These are practices bound by a patriarchal culture steeped in ancient customs.

In Islam, communications between people should be polite, kind and direct. For instance, Prophet Muhammad said that, "God likes that when someone does something, it must be done perfectly well". Ali, one of Islam's early leaders, said "the best discourse is expressive, great, brief and interesting." (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002, p.6)

Another concept closely associated with Arab communication is indirectness. The concept first introduced by Hall to describe the indirect communication patterns usually correlated to high-context culture. Arabs tend to use little information coded explicitly in a message. According to Hall, this is due to the fact that Arabs value courtesy and face saving. The concept of 'face saving' has been used as a synonym for the concept of 'Arab pride' in a BNP Paribas conference on Islamic banking, and was used as a reason that legitimised the creation and development of Islamic banking in the Persian Gulf.

Another fundamental value proposed by Feghali (1997) is elaborateness which concerns the Arab populations' tendency to use more words than Westerners to explain or express an idea. Arab communication emphasises exaggeration

(*mubalaghal*) and assertion (*tawkid*) in order to show credibility. This statement contradicts the theory of Rice and Al-Mossawi (2002) which said that within advertisements, exaggeration should be avoided. Arabic rhetoric is more 'presentational' than 'logically' persuasive in style. It relies on the power of words to evoke emotional and cognitive responses to the interlocutor (Kavoossi, 2000, p.40).

The last value affectiveness is based on the 'intuitive-affective style of emotional appeal' (Feghali, 1997 p.360). Arabs usually base their decisions on intuition, and therefore emotions are also an important part of the Arab communication style (Kalliny & Ghanems, 2009). Thus, Arabs tend to use rhythm and repeated words, tending to be more poetic and use more metaphor and proverbs than Western people (Feghali, 1997; Kavoossi, 2000).

The Arab culture is also seen as a culture of touch and Arabs (during conversation) tend to touch their interlocutor. Non-verbal communication is expressively used and extremely important to deciphering the Arabic speakers' meaning. Thus, touching between men within the BNP Paribas's advertisements has been emphasised. However, touching has to be done between the same sex, otherwise it will be considered offensive.

In addition, language is an active element of the Arabic identity and cultural construction and is the best communication tool to use for expressing ideas and feelings.

Arabs are more conscious of their language than many people in the world [...] Arabic seems to be a factor that creates a feeling of identity among the members of the Arab population regardless of their race, religion, tribe or region (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002, p.45).

The language is very important in the preservation of the culture and is representative of the cultural identity and the cultural reality of the people. Language can be defined as:

a veil over the reality of the culture which it is used, involving agreement of its users about what there is to be seen and how it should be seen (Feghali, 1997, p356).

The Arabic language is spoken by approximately two million people, and it is therefore not surprising to find that there are different styles and levels within the Arabic language. The classical level refers to the writing in the Holy Book, the modern '*fusha*' which refers to government language, media and religious speakers, and lastly, colloquial Arabic which refers to the local dialect used in everyday language. For example, *Shia* in Bahrain switches from their local dialect to the *Sunni* dialect as the *Sunni* control the politics and economy of the country. Thus, the *Sunni* dialect represents the local standard and most prestigious form of Bahraini Arabic (Feghali, 1997). In Bahrain most Arabs are bilingual; they also often speak English (depending on the context and situation) as they were colonised by the British. The languages and traditions of the migrant workers and expatriates make the region cosmopolitan (Melewar, Turnbull & Balabanis, 2000). Therefore, most of the BNP Paribas's communication media are translated into both English and Arabic.

'Brand', from a corporate identity perspective

As it has been mentioned, brand management and advertising are important tools that assist in the construction of corporate identity. Branding and advertisements are fundamental elements of CVI and actively contribute to the implementation of the corporate identity. Looking at branding and advertisements will enable us to understand how they operate within corporate identity theory and their relationship with culture. Corporate branding 'brings the ability to use the vision and culture of the company explicitly' (Hatch & Shultz, 2003, p.1042).

A brand 'should be viewed as a tool that helps to build organisation values and culture as well as a strategic tool enhancing external view of corporate brand' (Bickerton, 2000, p.43).

According to Bassani, et al. (2010), the brand of an organisation is the result of a synthesis between the logo, the product, its commercialisation and the communication of distribution. Cornelissen (2011) understands the organisation as a

brand, focussing on brand identities and claims that a brand has multiple identities. This seems to be a logical continuation of Balmer's theories, partly based on the fact that corporate identity carries multiple identities.

There are three different identities that a brand can incorporate in a strategy to build the corporate identity. The first is the 'monolithic identity' which refers to the corporate brand: everything is labelled and branded (this is the case of the BNP Paribas brand), depending on the branding strategy, an organisation will portray a different identity and image to the exterior.

The brand of a company is often associated with the concept of symbolism. According to Fill (2005), the symbolism of a brand can be defined through the visual and cultural aspects of the corporate logos, signage, colours, schemes, designs that constitute the corporate branding and identity. This research shows that the symbolic dimension within the BNP Paribas's corporate logo is quite strong. Brands provide cohesion and structure to the corporate identity but they also provide the 'symbolism and vivid imagery necessary to convey a good sense of who and what you are' (Argenti, 2007, p.77). For instance, in ancient Egypt the pharaohs used their signatures as a symbol of their administration. Thus, Ramses IV's signature would be seen as a logo. Another example is the French Revolution. Corporate identity and the power of symbolisation to inspire and engage people was used during the French Revolution where a strong system of symbols was established with the development of new flags, national anthems, uniforms and more (Argenti, 2007). Within corporate identity the brand is the crucial meeting point between the producer's necessity to distinguish themselves and the new demand of symbolic values from the public (Bassani, et al. 2010). Symbols reflect the company's identity and help to construct its image in a positive manner. Brands are very important in the discourse that a company wants to engage in with its clients and consumers, in order to tell a story and to carry cultural symbols. Thus, the visual identity of a brand is an important strategic element for an organisation within its international positioning and the way it wishes to be perceived in different countries and regions. For instance, Benetton's brand became a phenomenon when advertising campaigns were launched based on the idea of a multi-racial world through colours and language (Bassani, et al. 2010). Multinational organisations have to reposition their brand and more generally their corporate identity in order to adapt to

various markets. The highest level of identity and symbolism within branding is what is called the 'brand religion'³ which is a brand created in relation to a religion, a brand that responds to religious products or symbolises religious tenets (Bassani, et al. 2010). BNP Paribas did create a kind of brand religion with their Islamic banking brand 'Najmah'. The brand 'is paramount for consumers, a belief, or a religion that enables a range of other products to be introduced within a religious environment' (Fill, 2005, p.434). Marketers need to use symbols carefully as they are heavily dependent on the understanding of the company's country of origin (Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

According to Melewar and Walker (2003), customers of foreign countries expect to experience a number of services and products particular to that country; and thus the value and strength of a brand should cross borders. In order to maximises brands' effectiveness, 'corporate brands are only important if they successfully translate the core value proposition of the corporate offering into new territories' distinctive identity' (Melewar & Walker, 2003, p.157). Several cultural impacts on brands can be observed. For instance, a colour may have different meanings in different cultures (Schmitt, 1995), linguistics and names can carry different meanings depending on the country in which they operate. Time may also carry different meanings depending on the cultural perception of the time orientation dimension; culture may have different attitudes toward relationships with people and have different priorities regarding the meaning of life and people's role in society. These influence how people work, their behaviour and their perception of communication (Melewar & Walker, 2003). Thus, it is fundamental today that such organisations are conscious about their symbolic values and their clients' perceptions of the company's brand in order to build and transmit a strong identity in the market in which they operate (Bassani et al. 2010).

Brand and Islam

The challenge doing business in Islamic countries derives from the fact that Muslims have a different set of values and beliefs that guide their behaviour in both business and non-business contexts. As a result, a major issue that multinationals encounter when entering the Islamic market is whether or not they should use their existing

³ The purpose here is not to understand the term 'brand religion' as a reference to cults and community marketing but as a direct reference to religion.

brand or create a new brand specifically designed for Islamic markets. For instance, Coca Cola created Mecca Coca for the Islamic market in order to adapt their brand. BNP Paribas created its Islamic banking brand 'Najmah'. Unfortunately, Coca Cola offended many Muslims with its use of the word 'Mecca', which refers to the Muslims' holy place. In addition, multinationals' countries of origin are important for firms that wish to be part of the Islamic market (Alserhan, 2010). For example, Danish companies have been badly affected by the scandal of the cartoons and have been widely boycotted by Muslim consumers.

International corporate brands can only be successful if they communicate well on the core values of the Islamic population and market.

'Firms need to employ brand Islamization strategies based on information obtained from the Islamic market' (Alserhan, 2010, p.239).

Brand marketers should highlight and communicate the *halal* certification of their products (Rajagopal et al. 2011). According to Alserhan (2010) there are three different types of Islamic brands: the Islamic brand by religion, the Islamic brand by origin and the Islamic brand by customer. The Islamic brand by religion is *Sharia* compliant and respects *halal* logistics. This is, for example, the case of BNP Paribas Najmah. In Islam, brands cannot be *Sharia* compliant until they fulfil conditions related to ingredients, logistics, impacts and intentions. The Islamic brand by origin indicates a brand that acquires the description of 'Islamic' mainly because it originates from an Islamic country. This is the case of Emirates airlines. The company is related to Islam and the brand sounds Islamic. However the company is not *Sharia* compliant or *halal* as it does not follow the precept of Islam as it serves alcohol during flights.

And finally, the Islamic brands by customer are brands that emanate from non-Islamic countries but are designed to target Muslim consumers. This could be the case of the BNP Paribas conventional bank that aims its visuals at this audience.

It can be expected that some consumers in the Middle Eastern region have a negative perception of products coming from Western countries as they associate these products with negative aspects of Western markets, such as social injustice and

resource exploitation, but who at the same time, seem to aspire more and more everyday to a Westernised lifestyle.

People of the Middle East seek Western products (Marinov, 2007) which demonstrates contradictory behaviour towards their affiliation and desire to preserve their traditional Islamic culture with the desires for a Westernised lifestyle. This confirms the earlier discussion on modernity and national identity in crisis. According to Rice & Al-Mossawi, (2002), the interest in religion arises from today's emphasis on ethics in business and the continuing growth in globalisation. Because the impact of culture came from a natural and automatic process, the *Halal* phenomenon is acquiring global recognition and usage (Rajagopal et al. 2011).

Advertisements from a corporate identity perspective

Many organisations use advertisements to strengthen their identity to the public. To be effective, a brand needs a coherent communication strategy that supports the corporate identity. Thus, advertising campaigns are one of the main communication media used to 'develop brand awareness, values and associations' (Fill, 2005, p.508). Advertising reminds the consumer that the brand exists and the quality of the services or products. Thus, advertising campaigns should be strategic and should focus on the future; they also should represent the company's identity (Argenti & Forman, 2002). It is interesting, as we will see later, that most of BNP Paribas's campaigns emphasise the concept of future. Corporate advertising can be defined as 'paid use of media that seeks to benefit the image of the corporation as a whole rather than its products or services alone' (Argenti, 2007, p.87). Thus, corporate advertisements should portray a clear identity of the company based on a coherent communication strategy. In the case of the BNP Paribas, advertising campaigns will be more likely defined as financial advertising for potential investors.

Organisations usually launch an advertising campaign when they arrive in a new market to explain their vision, strategy, mission and culture (Argenti, 2007; Kim & Hatcher, 2009). As mentioned, culture, identity and image are strongly correlated and are part of a system of meanings and sense-making that defines a company to its various publics (Hatch & Shultz, 1997). According to Fill (2005), advertising campaigns aim to increase sales, to persuade through rational messages when it is assumed that

the buyer's decision making is predictable; to involve and provoke emotions and finally to be salient (the advertising campaign needs to be distinctive and unique). Thus, Fill (2005) claims that the main function of advertising is to communicate with specific audiences. In this sense, we can expect BNP Paribas's advertising to be aimed at communicating with Middle Eastern audiences. Argenti and Forman (2002) believe corporate advertisements have to fulfil the following functions: create a new company image, define the company's position in the market, enhance the company's stature in linking it to a cause; and strengthen the company financially. Depending on the strategy of an organisation, advertising can either enhance the company's image or highlight issues or causes that the company supports. Advertising can then be seen as an active tool and component of corporate identity creation. It is important to know that advertising can serve different aspects of branding and corporate identity through its powerful polyvalence.

Since corporate advertisement can tell a story about a company as a whole, large organisations may need to use corporate advertisements to simplify their image in the minds of stakeholders and to show what unifies the company despite the geographical spread and variety of its business (Argenti & Forman, 2002, p.124).

Analysing BNP Paribas's advertising campaigns will allow the researcher to characterise the image the bank wants to portray to its audience and to identify the story or cultural strategies that the bank uses in order to conquer the local and the Islamic market.

Islam and Middle Eastern advertising guidelines

According to Marinov (2007) and Rice and Al-Mossawi (2002), advertisements and other communication media in Islamic markets should follow the requirements of the Islamic culture. Religious and social values and attitudes shape the language and the images that appear in Middle Eastern print advertising (Kavoossi, 2000). As a result, religious beliefs determine consumers' behaviour and the creation of advertising messages and content (Chachula et al. 2009).

The necessity for local adaptation applies particularly to advertisements, which should consider the degree of adherence to Islamic practices as well as brand and country of origin preferences (Marinov, 2007, p.108).

Culture has a significant influence on multinationals' advertising. In fact, advertising reflecting local cultural values is more persuasive (Kalliny & Ghanems, 2009). Some elements within advertising may be perceived negatively by some cultures or be against people's religious beliefs (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002), and 'advertisements can be viewed as a window to a given culture and a mirror that reflects culture' (Kalliny & Ghanems, 2009, p.313). Consumers understand advertising messages better if they are culturally relevant.

Cultural values convey through advertisements messages that are considered powerful forces shaping consumers 'motivation, lifestyles and product choice'. (Kalliny & Ghanems, 2009, p.313).

Therefore, marketers must understand the cultural values of a given society in order to choose and create effective and appropriate advertising messages. Communication professionals should thus not only base their strategy on the cultural values of the country but should remember what is prohibited in order to avoid a negative reaction to their advertisements. The promotion of prohibited or controversial products such as alcohol may offend the population which will damage the reputation of the entire company and brand (Chachula et al. 2009). The *Qu'ran* does not prohibit advertising and advertising is generally used to support the Islamic faith (Al-Makaty, Van Tubergen, Withlow & Boyd, 1996; Chachula et al. 2009). But professionals working in an Arab environment should 'think globally and act locally' (Kavoossi 2000, p.40). Islam is often misunderstood by Westerners as it proposes an entire socioeconomic system with specific guidelines for managerial tasks such as advertising (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002).

In adherence to these guidelines, advertisements' messages should be gender specific and male oriented. According to some theorists, such as Rice and Al-Mossawi (2002), messages in advertising should not exaggerate, mislead or deceive but should be informative. Exaggeration can be seen as a form of lying, whether exaggeration is used through metaphorical or embellishing language. However, exaggeration is authorised if it is extremely obvious (Kavoossi & Frank, 1990). Religious terminology and

statements may be used in advertisements to comfort consumers regarding the Islamic integrity of products and services. The use of some verses from the *Qu'ran* can make advertising more appealing to Muslim consumers (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002; Chachula et al. 2009). For instance, the BNP Paribas Najmah brochure presents a quote from the prophet Muhammad on one of the pages (see Figure 4.12). In 2000 an advert for Ford used the religious word '*Ma'ashallah*' (whatever God intends) which illustrates the trend of using religious references in advertising in the Middle East.

Even though the use of religious statements is accepted, an inappropriate use could offend and provoke a negative reaction and thus these statements have to be used carefully and sensitively (Kalliny & Ghanem, 2009; Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002; Keenan & Shoreh, 2000). Finally, messages should emphasise modesty and simplicity (Kalliny & Ghanem, 2009).

Advertising in the Middle East tends to focus more on values such as filial obedience, customs and traditions, loyalty to one's group, honour and patience than Western advertising (Kalliny & Ghanem, 2009). In order to see how Islam impacts on marketing and communication media in Gulf countries or the Middle East, Rice and Al-Mossawi (2002) proposed an analysis of the four cultural dimensions important to Islam, portrayed in advertising which are discussed in the next section.

Rice & Al-Mossawi (2002) Islamic cultural dimension reflected in the data analysis

The first dimension relates to the relationship between people. As has been mentioned before, Gulf countries are relationship based-cultures with sources of honesty and truth (Marinov, 2007, p.107). Advertisements should communicate truthfully and honestly about products and services. Deceptive advertising should be avoided. Thus Prophet Muhammad said '...he who cheats is not one of us'. This statement was made in the context of a sales incident in the marketplace. The lesson was that a seller who is aware of a defect in a product is obliged to disclose it before the sale (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002, p.7). The recurrent theme in the BNP Paribas's advertisements therefore is the relationship between the bank and its clients. Pictures

of men being together, to maintain business relationships, or within more personal relationships driven by familial ties can be observed.

Islam also emphasises diversity within races and ethnicities. The Gulf countries' population is very diverse as they comprise large numbers of expatriate Muslims such as Indians, Pakistanis and many others. Advertisements and other communications media in the Gulf region reflect this diversity. For example, BNP Paribas's advertisements tend to promote unions and alliances by portraying different ethnicities with both Westerners and Middle Easterners in pleasant business situations.

Advertising in the Arab world defines the respective roles of men and women. For example, women tend to be represented in the home, engaged in hospitality, or sharing a meal with a child, whereas men are portrayed through cooperative activities and tasks usually related to specific occupations. Advertisements portraying men and women together are rare (Kavoossi, 2000). Women are also portrayed in modest clothes (Kalliny & Ghanem, 2009). It is noteworthy that in Islam, women are responsible for the child-rearing and so should have free access to education. They also have the right to work outside the home, and, although the vast majority of working women in Saudi Arabia and Qatar tend to follow traditional career paths such as healthcare and education, trends are changing in other less conservative Gulf countries such as Bahrain and Dubai (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002). However, according to Thomas (1998) there are no serious images of women in Islamic advertising. Thus, in many banking advertisements, women are often presented as submissive to their husbands who have the money, suggesting that it is not her money, even though in reality, women have their own bank accounts and sign their own cheques. It is therefore ironic that no pictures of women within the BNP Paribas campaign have been observed. The advertising campaigns are mostly male oriented, and the only images that the bank portrays of women are in the CSR calendar. But these images are not representative of the way women should be portrayed. In fact in the BNP Paribas case, women are portrayed in a workplace; they are pictured as business women that have overcome sex segregation and job inequality.

The second cultural Islamic dimension proposed by Rice and Al-Mossawi (2002) in relation to advertising messages and values is time orientation.

(The) culture's perspective on the temporal aspects of human life such as the attitude towards tradition and the past, the degree to which people accept the present situation for what it is, and the extent of planning for the future (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002, p.8).

Time orientation also includes the notion of materialism. Prophet Muhammad advises Muslims to be moderate in all their affairs but Islam is not an austere religion. It allows people to satisfy their needs, although emphasises sharing with others and the notion of social responsibility.

Muslims also have a strong orientation towards tradition. They believe that the life-system encouraged in the *Qur'an* and *sunnah* can be produced at all times and places. They are proud of their cultural, intellectual and scientific heritage and as a result, advertising emphasising education and science will have a positive effect on Muslim consumers. The time orientation concept is omnipresent within the BNP Paribas's communication media through its advertisements' linguistic messages and its slogan 'the bank of a changing world' implying the notion of future.

Human nature is the third dimension proposed by Rice and Al-Mossawi, 2002. It relates to the 'self concept' and the concept of others and in this regard modesty is a key value. Thus, men and women in advertisements should be seen wearing modest dress, and in modest postures. Women will usually be wearing traditional dress, veiled for the more strict application of the religion or simply well covered so that her curves are not visible. In Islamic countries, both men and women must cover their torso and upper legs.

say to the believing men that they restrain their looks and guard their private parts that is purer for them. And say to the believing women that they restraint their look and guard their private parts (24:31, 32 *Qu'ran*) (Chachula et al. 2009).

For instance, the advertisement for the perfume Davidoff 'Cool Water' has been adapted. In Western countries it shows a naked woman coming out of a lake. In Bahrain she appeared behind a rock so that one cannot see other parts of her body. Similarly, the BNP Paribas's visuals portray men wearing traditional dress (as an example of modesty) and respecting the traditional culture.

Bahrain advertisements and the issue of controversial products

Bahrain is more liberal than some other countries in the Middle East such as Egypt or Saudi Arabia and so will be more tolerant to Western-style advertisements than those more conservative countries. However, even though Bahrain is more liberal, communication and marketing professionals still have to follow a code of acceptance regarding media which reads:

Gulf Media International W.L.L. (Bahrain) Code of Acceptance

Advertisements and advertising materials will not be accepted for or retained on display if they:

Depict murder scenes or terror or acts of violence.

Are calculated to demoralise, extenuate crime, break the law or incite anyone.

Depict or refer to indecency, obscenity, nudity or striptease or offend the general public.

Are likely through wording, design or possible defacement to offend the general public.

Advertise films which have been refused a permit for public exhibition.

Might wound racial susceptibilities or those of coloured or foreign people or members of a group who may not be otherwise protected by the terms of this Code.

Refer to religious, sacred or other politically, morally or socially sensitive subjects in a manner which might give offence or seek to use "" as a medium for controversy arising from such subjects.

Attack a member or the policies of any government.

Are of a political nature whether produced by a political party or not, other than those which simply announce social activities or meetings together with the

names of the speakers and the subject to be discussed. The wording used in announcing the subject must not be politically controversial or call for a particular point, policy or action.

Might foment social unrest.

Advertise contraceptives or conflict with the advertising practice in relation to the advertising of medicines and treatments.

Contain illustrations or copy which are distorted or exaggerated in such a way as to convey false impressions, are calculated to deceive the public, or contain statements of a knocking or extravagant nature.

Might adversely affect in any way the operations revenue or market position of “” or any of its associated business (e.g. by advertising competitive services by the use of designs of texts which might lead to confusion or by offers of employment in competition with the requirements of the “” or any associated business).

(Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002, p.11)

Chachula et al. (2009), categorised controversial advertisements that might be perceived negatively by Muslim communities and that are often used in Western countries. They point out that advertisements that refer to magic are forbidden. Using magical references such as wizards, vampires or any kind of supernatural human is forbidden. God is the only one who has supernatural gifts and power and so any advertisement that portrays magic will be controversial and offensive. In contrast, European advertisements tend to use magical references for their articles or cleaning agent's commercials. For instance, the French advertisement '*Monsieur Propre*' portrays a cleaning man with supernatural powers.

Furthermore, because alcohol is *haram*, alcohol advertisements are forbidden. The same applies to cigarettes. According to the *Qu'ran*:

the devil wants only to cast among you enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and games of chance and to turn you from remembering Allah and from prayer. Will you then desist (5:90-91).

Followers of Islam believe in the supremacy of human life compared to other forms of life and objects. The representation of animals as close to humans can be perceived as offensive. Whereas in European countries such as France, dogs are considered as man's best friend; Muslims would be offended.

It also seems to be more difficult to use specific symbols in Arab countries than in Western ones. 'Symbols in advertising should reflect high human value' (Melewar, Turnbull & Balabanis, 2000, p.532).

Symbols containing crosses are forbidden. For instance, the Red Cross in the Middle East has been replaced by a red crescent. Because snowflakes have a cross design, they cannot be used either.

Language use is also restricted. While phrases from the *Qu'ran* are encouraged, certain vocabulary should be avoided such as 'enjoy' or 'exciting' as these can have sexual connotations.

Eastern (Islamic countries) vs. Western (European/ French countries) advertising

With growing technology and media deregulation, the concept of globalisation within corporate communication has become significant for multinationals. Multinationals want to create homogeneous images of the organisation and its brand in various markets in order to create global brand equity (Kalliny & Ghanem, 2009). The 1990s were marked by a rise in investment from multinational corporate happy to take advantage of the growing opportunities the economy of the Middle East has to offer. Consequently, the Middle East is seen as a region with similar culture and beliefs which results in a standardised approach to advertising (Melewar, Turnbull & Balabanis, 2000). Many multinationals see Middle Eastern markets as a single regional market, believing that cultural gaps between West and East have been reduced over the years (Melewar, Turnbull & Balabanis, 2000), but the people in the region claim that Western advertising companies do not represent their Arabic culture and history and are more a reflection of Western values and culture (Kalliny & Ghanem, 2009). In order to close the gap between the two regions, a global advertising strategy in the region has been implemented. The Middle East region has witnessed a growth of

standardised branding and advertising with aspects of both Eastern and Western traditions and cultural dimensions co-existing in line with the 'globalisation view' (Gram, 2007, p.303). There has been an increasing tendency towards adopting a regionalised or homogenising approach to advertising; however, a majority of corporate claim that a standardised approach provides a consistent image across markets. Adaptations of advertisements are not always seen as crucial since an important number of advertisers continue to apply standardisation to their advertisement campaigns (Gram, 2007).

As a result, an important percentage of companies follow a standardised approach in their creative implementation. However, an important number of companies seem to follow their home market's advertising strategy. This is the case of BNP Paribas, which follows the European guidelines regarding their brand and advertising campaigns. Respondents claimed that within an advertising strategy they tended to use a similar theme for both their home country and the Middle East (see Figures 4.8 and 4.9). Some Middle Eastern countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait or the UAE, 'practice a blend of Islamic and civil law coming from colonial influences' (Melewar, Turnbull & Balabanis, 2000, p531). While most Middle Eastern nations are fiercely nationalistic, companies did not see attitudes towards Western culture as disadvantageous. Thus, the success of a standardised campaign approach in the region does not seem to be threatened. In addition, advertisers are not concerned by the language differences within the Middle East region and advertisers will choose to use standard forms of language such as English or Classical Arabic instead of the colloquial Arabic or other local dialects. However, cultural differences cannot be ignored, and might cause a barrier in the execution of a standardised approach to advertising (Melewar, Turnbull & Balabanis, 2000). There is an 'impracticability of treating the world as a market' (Gram, 2007, p.292). According to de Mooij (2003), advertisements only interest the local audience when it is adapted to their local culture and traditions.

According to Overby (2005), national cultures form managerial attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. The author categorises France as a high-context culture in comparison with the USA. As a result, France tends to emphasise indirect communication and the notion of 'being'. France is also grounded in a hierarchical national culture, with a

restriction to the flow of communication. Within French organisations, one person takes the decisions for others without consultation. Regarding the concept of power distance, we find high scores for Latin European countries, including France and Belgium, Mediterranean countries, most Latin American countries, and South-East Asian countries. Likewise, power distance and uncertainty avoidance are the two dimensions most relevant to the structuring and functioning of (Hofstede, 1983). Consequently, French culture will stress rules, regulation and control in the workplace which would not be the case in Middle Eastern countries.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), claim that Latin Europe is more person-oriented having more use of intuition and sensitivity. For example, the French often carry a familial idea of the organisation. Organisations are often represented through the paternal figure or follow a hierarchical organisation pattern. Therefore, we need to keep in mind that cultures differ even within Europe even though the French national identity is incorporated within the concept of a European identity and so needs to be understood through European culture despite French cultural particularities being varying from other European countries.

If we compare French culture with the Arabic culture, French people will tend to shift toward the low-context culture scale. France can be situated within the scale of high to low -context culture in the middle, between a low-context culture like America and a high-context culture like the Middle East. Thus, the graph presented by the GLOBE study to describe the location of each country according to clusters on the different cultural dimensions showed not a very consequential difference between Latin Europe and Middle Eastern countries.

However, the positioning of cultural aspects in advertisements may be different from advertisements in the Arab world. Unlike advertisements in Gulf countries, in Europe, the more modern and controversial an advertisement is, the better it is (Chachula et al. 2009). Appeals in French advertising differ from Middle Eastern advertising appeals. Advertising is a cultural product, 'Advertising is clearly a cultural phenomenon, culturally inspired and created within expectation of a culture' (Taylor, Hoy & Haley, 1996, p.2). Advertising must be understood in the light of cultural expectation and it

must be understood how advertising cultural dimensions are presented and play different roles in different societies. Cultural differences in advertising between France and Gulf countries can be explained by the fact that France is a secular country and has separated religion from politics, economics, business and education. Thus, the principal difference between Arab countries that follow Islam in regards to advertising is that Western advertising, especially French, tends to use lots of sexual appeal and nudity, as in many perfume advertisements (Chachula et al 2009).

According to Taylor, Hoy and Haley (1996), French adverts have four characteristics: the 'séduction' (seduction), 'le spectacle' (show), 'l'amour' (love) and l'humour (humour). The verb 'séduire' in French means to tempt, to attract. To charm, to fascinate is a notion often used within French commercials. Moreover French advertisements are said to be more emotional and subtle. They tend to use symbolic references, historical and literary; they use sex appeal to tell a story, to appeal to individuality and to make exaggerated promises. They also use humour. The French are visually-oriented and are sensitive to aesthetics, colour and design; they have a strong artistic culture. The theme of romance is widely used in French advertising as an entire cultural dimension.

2.8 Summary

The extensive literature available has highlighted the cultural complexities and, more specifically, the different cultural layers in which a culture can operate. The literature review explored theories on cross culture, cultural interaction, globalisation, corporate identity and national identity in correlation with the Arab Middle Eastern and French/European culture in visual communication media. The questions and gaps in regards to culture and corporate identity have been addressed. Theories on corporate identity highlight the difficulties in finding a consensus on how culture impacts the different aspects of corporate identity. The role of culture in regards to the notion of globalisation, which challenges the concept of national identity, has been proposed. The Middle Eastern and, more generally, the Arab culture has been viewed in opposition to the French/European culture and in the light of modernisation.

Differences and similarities between both cultures have been highlighted by the theories.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the qualitative methodology that has been chosen for conducting this research. The case study, as the main methodological component, will be presented through the different methods that have been chosen to collect and analyse data. Important issues such as sampling, access, ethics, and analysis technique of the different visual communication media and interviews will be explained. Finally this chapter will highlight the limitations of the methodology and research.

3.2 Method design

The case study

A case study can be used both as qualitative and quantitative data. In this research the case study is qualitative as the researcher evaluates data in a qualitative fashion. Moreover the case study is often described as one qualitative technique. The qualitative data used for this case study comes in various forms such as visuals, interviews, and observation. According to Thorne (2000, p.68),

What makes a case study qualitative is that it usually relies on inductive reasoning processes to interpret and structure the meaning that can be derived from data.

The BNP Paribas's study relies on qualitative data and so, consequently, forms qualitative research that is partly based on the researcher's interpretation of data.

The case study has been a preferred research methodology for business and organisational issues as well as many other fields of study. Case study methodology has become a rigorous method of research in its own right (Cassell & Symon, 2004; Perry, 1998). It is used mainly to understand detailed social or organisational processes as it supposes a collection of rich data taken in context. Using the case study as the

main method for this research to understand how BNP Paribas Bank's corporate identity operates within a particular cultural context is appropriate, as the data has been collected in regards to the context of the corporation and the country in which the bank operates. Moreover, Cassell and Symon (2004) claim that the case studies method may be crucial in cross-national analysis.

Traditionally case studies have only been considered as an appropriate method for exploratory research. According to Perry, (1998, p.786) the case study can be defined as a 'research methodology based on interviews that is used and involves body knowledge. It aims at analysing the context in regards to studying theoretical issues'. Thus, case study research 'consists of a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, phenomena, within their context' (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p.323). The method usually combines both description and explanation, testing theory and generating theory through a descriptive process. There is a continuous interaction between theoretical issues and data collected, and thus the case study tends to match data analysis with theory and does not aim to provide any statistical generalisation (Chetty, 1996). As a result, researchers can take two approaches using the case study to:

- A) test theories or
- B) to develop theory.

The correlation of prior theories with case study data can trigger emergent theories or the researcher can use the case study in order to test prior theories on the subject (Cassell & Symon, 2004). This research will use the case study to test theories arising from the literature review.

The literature recommending the use of case studies rarely specifies how many cases should be developed; this decision is left to the researcher. In fact, there are no precise guidelines as to how many samples qualitative research should have (Perry, 1998). According to Chetty (1996) single case studies are frequently used and a single case method appears to be better in the formation of theories. The use of a single case study has often

led scholars to see new theoretical relationships and question old ones in part because such focused research permits the deep understanding of an entity. This

is not to deny the limitations of single site research, from which it is often difficult to gain comparative insights or to formulate generalizing theory' (Coupland & Brown, 2004, p.1329)

Chetty (1996) claims that multiple case studies focus too much on construct development and measurability and often miss the context. Multiple case studies can be considered as a hybrid form of research. A good story telling in relation to a single case study generates better insights than multiple case studies based on the creation of good constructs. Moreover, a single case study can provide valuable information about the research question. The challenge is to provide insights on what is unique to an organisation as opposed to what is shared by organisations (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Yin (1994) states that it is important for the researcher to either base the case study on exploratory, descriptive or explanatory approaches as it may affect the analysis of the data.

A case study's data collection can allow for the development of an existing theory based on empirical evidence. The data may be organised around certain topics, key themes or central questions. For instance, this research's interviews are carefully analysed and organised through the questions that have been asked of the participants. The interview questions will be categorised by the different themes and topics in relation to the visual analysis of the bank's communication media.

According to Yin (1989) a case study aims to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not explicit and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. The major strengths of a case study lie in its ability to measure and record behaviour and in collecting data from various and multiple sources such as documentation, archival records, interviews, participants or direct observation (Chetty, 1996).

The case study's different paradigms

According to Perry (1998), within a case study there are two types of paradigms: the deductive and the inductive. The deductive approach represents the positivist paradigm and the inductive approach represents the phenomenological paradigm.

Case studies often involve the collection of perceptions that are unobservable but the positivism approach supposes that only observable phenomena can and should be researched.

According to Perry (1998), the deductive approach is not appropriate for a case study. The case study tends to take the inductive approach (Perry, 1998; Cassell & Symon, 2004). It is therefore important to recognise that a case study does include the concept of deduction based on prior theory. We cannot separate the deductive from the inductive in the process of case study analysis; the case study research design is flexible and can include both induction and deduction. Case studies involve both the generation of hypotheses and the building of theory. Both grounded theory and theory emanating from hypotheses are involved in a simultaneous way within case study analysis.

Within this case study, different methods to analyse the data will be used. Yin (1994) claims that the uses of multiple methods are included in the definition of a case study.

A case study generally includes different methods because of the research issue which can be best addressed through this strategy '(Cassell & Symon, 2004, p.324).

Different methodologies methods give a case study more depth. The use of different methods allows a greater view and a better understanding of the social complexities.

3.3 Data collection

Procedure and Ethics

This research consists of looking at how national culture impacts on the BNP Paribas bank's corporate identity and more precisely on its communication media. In order to understand the mechanism of culture and corporate identity within BNP Paribas, the research involved semi-structured interviews.

According to Qu and Dumay (2011), interviews are one of the most important qualitative data collection methods that are widely used. The semi-structured

interview involves prepared questions, with defined themes, guided by the researcher and is designed to extract more elaborate responses. It directs the conversation between the researcher and the interviewees toward certain topics and issues. The semi-structured method is

flexible and capable of disclosing important and often hidden facets of human and organisational behaviour [...]. It enables interviewees to provide responses in their own terms and in the way they think, and use language and it shows the way the interviewees perceive the social world (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p.246).

During the course of semi-structured interviews, the researcher takes the same thematic approach with all its participants in order to guarantee a certain consistency. This method guides the interview but, at the same time, allows the interviewee to go on and expand on their knowledge and responses about the theme being discussed.

To ensure accuracy, all interviews have been recorded using appropriate software (a voice recorder) and note taking. This procedure was explained to all participants prior to the interview, and their explicit consent was sought. The semi-structured interview part of the case study approach provided a depth of understanding of the symbols and messages chosen to communicate the bank's corporate identity. As mentioned, semi-structured interviews will offer further qualitative understanding and appreciation of the processes and actions involved as well as how French banks find a balance between Western and Eastern culture

The interviews will also allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the local environment on the French banks' messages and specifically how their corporate identity is communicated through various visual media. These interviews will also give in some cases, details about the bank's communication media strategies, issues and stories. The interviews have been conducted with five bank employees working in BNP Paribas Bahrain in departments relevant to the bank's communication and marketing who are able to give valuable information on the bank's cultural identity and strategy. The interviewees are mixed gender (males and females) who have been asked 12 questions in total related to the bank's corporate identity and diverse communications media in relation to culture. The questions categorised the main themes covered during the interviews in regard to the bank's relation to local

culture. In order to protect the interviewees' privacy, their names have been concealed and replaced by letters and numbers such as RP01 (RP=respondent).

Furthermore, the case study will consist of specific examples of communication media used by BNP Paribas in Bahrain and the Middle East that will be analysed using semiotic and iconography analysis. This will allow the researcher to describe and analyse the organisation or event in detail and, as such, the case study will:

provide detail only found in hindsight and present it in such way as to establish what strategies worked and why (Stacks, 2002, p.72).

Participants and Ethics

The research does not target participants of any particular social or cultural group, but rather considers corporate identity and how it is transformed in a specific cultural environment. Communication practitioners who participate in this interview are culturally diverse and are adult professional communication practitioners working for the BNP Paribas Bank. They have been either working in the department of communication or have a close working relationship with the communication or marketing function of the bank. Privacy and confidentiality issues have been taken into consideration in this research as well as possible ethical issues. Thus, an ethics approval was necessary for this research to ensure the integrity of the case study as it covers the sensitive question of culture and identity as well as interactions with people. In total five people were interviewed, three of them working for the communication department and two others are working within Islamic banking. The reason for this number was the limited availability of participants. Communication management is not a well-known profession in the Middle East, and thus trained communication practitioners are rare.

The researcher worked in the field, as a trainee in BNP Paribas's communication service. Thus, the researcher can be defined as a participant observer provide with the opportunity to better understand the environment and the context of the creation of the various BNP Paribas's communication's cultural identity. According to Cassell and Symon (2004, p.154), Participant observation 'involves social interactions between the researcher and informants in the milieu of the latter'. The researcher built a

relationship with the different bank professionals and was able to grasp the complexities of culture in Bahrain and the relationship to culture the BNP Paribas maintained in the country. The researcher located herself more as a 'participant as observer' (Cassell & Symon, 2004) forming relationships with the bank and more especially with the staff working in the communication department. The researcher also participated in activities as a trainee, but did not make any secret of her intention to undertake this research.

Semiotics and Iconography

Most of BNP Paribas's visuals released in Bahrain have been selected for this research from BNP Paribas' creation of Islamic banking in 2003 until now (2011). Moreover the visuals selected have been chosen on the basis of their displays of culture and corporate identity. There was a decision to focus on the more recent visuals in order to grasp BNP Paribas's new visual identity and its cultural approach. The sample selection allowed the researcher to study the strategic evolution of the bank in regards to its cultural position and its corporate identity.

In this research BNP Paribas's visual media are analysed through a combination of semiotics and iconography as both methods seem to complement each other. In fact, iconography and semiotics both propose three stages in the analysis, but iconography will result in an analysis of the cultural context, a concept that does not seem to be explicit in the semiotics approach. Semiotics looks directly at possible symbolic signs and the symbolic dimension of an image in relation to its linguistic message whereas iconography only focuses on the artistic characteristics of the image which encompasses cultural and symbolic dimensions. Iconography does not allow any linguistic analysis and so cannot be used solely in the analysis of advertising.

Iconography was first introduced by Panofsky (1955) to analyse painters. The visual data analysis I will follow its method that consists to three stages. The bank's different visuals will be analysed through the concept of layers. Iconography tends to look at the image through the analysis of different layers that constitute a picture or a painting. Moreover Panofsky

hoped to give interpretations of works of art that would show them to be symbolic expressions of the cultures within which they were created (Hatt and Klonk, 2006, p.96).

As a result Panofsky (1955) proposes three strata to follow in the analysis of an art work. The first stratum is called the 'primary or natural subject matter'. This stage consists in identifying the different pure forms and lines of the picture or painting such as colour, particular shapes, and see whether humans or animals are represented. In other words, during this stage the researcher looks at the formal elements of the art part of the bank's visuals. The researcher needs to describe and provide very basic information about the picture.

The second stratum 'secondary or conventional subject matter' is appreciated by realising that, for example, a female figure with an apple refers to Adam and Eve. Our cultural knowledge comes into play to describe the image.

The last stratum 'intrinsic meaning or content' refers to the cultural context of a painting or picture. In this last phase, the researcher tends to identify the artistic nature, the attitude of a nation, period, class, religious or philosophical persuasion connected to the art work. In this last stage, the researcher interprets what he sees. All of these elements cited will be interpreted as 'symbolical values'.

Iconography methodology will suit the analysis of the bank's visual data as it proposes and focuses on the symbolic and cultural dimension present in any picture. Because the researcher looks at the impact of culture and identity within the different visuals that the bank uses to promote itself, it seems that iconography, as well as semiotics, will enable the researcher to understand the mechanism of culture and its relation to the bank's identity in its communication media.

every art work is specific to one culture and sees every cultural expression as a characteristic articulation of certain essential tendencies of the human mind (Hatt & Klonk, 2006, p.97).

Therefore, the researcher needs to keep in mind that her practical experience as a participant observer will play an important role in the analysis of the data and that her interpretation of the visuals are not necessarily impartial. It is important to

acknowledge that this method and the researcher being a participant observer, includes potential bias.

Semiological interest in advertisements first emerged from Roland Barthes's work. This thesis will use Barthes' framework to analyse the bank's advertisements. According to Barthes, the advertising image is a good subject for analysis because it is frank and empathic. Semiotics introduces the concept of code, sign, linguistic message and the distinction between connotation and denotation. The method consists in 'breaking down' the object to understand its functions, mechanisms in order to understand a phenomenon, and more precisely the meaning of the image (Bianchi, 2011). According to Barthes (1964, p.245)

in advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional, the signifieds of the advertisement message are formed a priori by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible.

The author proposes three messages to analyse in the picture. The first message is linguistic, the second is the denoted image and the third is the connoted image. In this thesis, these three messages will be used and be broken down into three stages (each message equal to one stage) to analyse the bank's advertisements in relation with some iconographic elements. Semiotic analysis of an image offers a very flexible way to understand the images' cultural and symbolic mechanisms. Because semiotics does not provide a clear way and concrete instructions to analyse visuals, the researcher will follow Barthes's major steps and add into the analysis features of Panofsky's iconographic analysis. As a result, the researcher will not limit the research to one way of understanding and analysing semiotics but will instead include iconographic elements, proposed by Panofsky (1955), in order to make a good transition and a smooth analysis of the visuals using the right balance of semiotic and iconographic methodology. In fact, semiotics is often linked with the idea of art history and so, indirectly, iconography, Floch (2001), for example, as a semiotic author, does propose a symbiosis between art history methods and semiotic analysis. Consequently, the iconographic features will be included in Roland Barthes's methodology to provide a better balance and transition within the analysis of visual communication media.

In Barthes's semiotics, the linguistic message lies in the juxtaposition between the text and the image. It follows that the question the researcher needs to ask in the analysis of the advertisement is: Does the text in the advertisement add information to the image or does the text have a redundant role? The text in the image can have different functions such as anchorage and relay. Thus, a denoted description of the image corresponds to an anchorage. The linguistic message guides the researcher's interpretation of the symbolic messages of the image. Moreover the linguistic message clarifies and provides a selective control of the researcher's comprehension when analysing the advertising.

The denoted image can be compared to the first stratum of Panofsky. The analysis of the denoted image consists in looking at the lines, forms and colours of the image without looking at any symbolic dimension the image might portray. According to Barthes, when we look at advertisements we never meet an advertisement that proposes a pure image without symbolism. The work of the researcher in this phase is to put aside the apprehension of the symbolic dimension of the advertisement and focus only on the visible and explicit features of it. The role of the denoted image is to naturalise and legitimise the symbolic message.

Finally the connoted image refers to a sign that represents and defines the symbolic and cultural dimension of the picture. According to Barthes, (1964) signs within the third message are drawn in a cultural code.

In regards to the Bank's television commercial in their 'Keep Reaching' campaign, semiotics will also be used. In fact, semiotics reminds us that television commercial are not dealing with referents but with signs, as it is not possible to verify TV referents from sounds and images. Some aspects of the image and soundtrack that we think are non-representational actually function as symbols and often carry connotative meanings; examples may include the colour of light, music or photographic technique, such as, soft focus, cadrage etc.

'one of the goals of semiotic analysis of TV is to make us conscious of the use of connotation on TV, so that we realize how much of what appears naturally meaningful on TV is actually historical, changeable, and culturally specific'(Seiter 1992)

Because semiotics recognises the role of the combination of all verbal and visual sign production, including aesthetic production, it tends to take a less condemning view of television and therefore may have more to say than more traditional media. Consequently, semiotic appears as the best method to analyse the BNP Paribas television commercial. Thus, the commercials' different shots, the mise en scene, the sound, the colouring image, rhythms, as well as the different cadrages will be studied in order to understand the sign system and the different cultural codes portrayed.

3.4 Summary

This chapter outlines the use of the case study as the main approach of the research with a triangulation of methods and data, showing that it is the most appropriate approach for the purpose of the study and the nature of the research. It also outlines the methodologies' limitations in regard to the difficulties in guaranteeing integrity using the semiotic and iconographic approaches. Moreover, the restrictions and strengths of using a single case study have been highlighted. As evidenced in this chapter, confidential and ethical issues have been taken into consideration in regards to participants' confidentiality issues. Both data (visual communication media and interviews) have been collected in the context of the country and the workplace as an important feature of the proper conduct of the case study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The qualitative stage of this study aims to provide a complete cultural analysis on the different visuals used and published by the BNP Paribas in Bahrain over the years. This should give us some significant information on the different cultural symbols portrayed as well as the potential cultural divergences and impact of the bank's communication media. The researcher will be able to define the possible tensions or balances between the bank's different identities.

The visuals are presented in chronological order from the oldest visual to the most recent. The analysis also presents the results of five semi-structured, in-depth interviews that were conducted as part of the case study. Overall, the data analysis represents the essence of the case study where analysis of the bank's communication visual media is conducted through a mix of semiotics and iconography and understood through the participants' interviews.

It is also important to acknowledge that an advertising agency has been used for all visuals. A local advertising agency has worked on the different visuals released in Bahrain such as 'Le Petit Prince' the wealth management campaign, the picture from the CSR calendar, Eid and Ramadan cards. The 'Keep Reaching' campaign has been conceived by the communication department at the headquarters in Paris and followed precise guidelines. Therefore, these advertising agencies could be understood as potential cultural intermediaries where, in fact, BNP Paribas has complete creative control. Thus, advertising agencies used for the different campaigns simply execute the precise creative demands of the Bank's communication service.

Bahrain's popular communication media

In order to understand and locate the significance of the research methods which only focus on visual media, the researcher asked the participants what kind of media had a positive impact in Bahrain. To the questions: Does the type of media have an impact on the way messages are delivered in a specific culture? Do you think one type of communication medium is more efficient than another in relaying these messages, all

participants recognised the importance of adapting the type of communication channels to suit to the country and culture where they operate. One participant commented:

absolutely, it is key for every advertising campaign to fit the channel to be used to fit the local culture (RP02).

Three participants acknowledged the importance of television and outdoor billboards campaigns in the region. According to one participant, the rate of the most effective types of media in the region is television first, then daily newspapers and billboards. Billboards are considered as a very important communication channel for advertising. Another participant also recognised the importance of outdoor communication. The interviewee claimed that in the Middle East, malls are part of Middle Eastern Arab culture; that Bahrainis spend a lot of time in malls and, as a result, outdoor advertisement is very effective in the Gulf.

Another interviewee also stated that outdoor advertisement campaigns were very important in the region and that the online media were not yet important sources of communication. Unlike Western countries, where most of communication is via online, social media, and are web based, in the Middle East they are still far behind in this new way to communicate. The communication practitioner said:

The Middle East is very different from the developed world, as the developed world is now running with huge campaigns. All their communication are online, social media they are web based, they are interactive. In a few years maybe Middle East will follow this path but I think very much here it is still very traditional. (RP03).

Overall communication professionals claimed that the bank mostly operates on relationship-based communication. Relationships are very important within the Arabic culture. Most business, transactions and communication are based on the concept of relationship in Middle East.

In contrast, one interviewee believed that online, web and other social media are beginning to be more important in the region especially for the younger generation.

The communication practitioner regarded the internet and online communication as the future tool for communication.

The online (YouTube, Twitter, blogs, and Facebook) went up and certain websites opened for political reasons chatting and sharing information. YouTube has peaked here during the unrest. (RP01)

For Islamic banking, it is different, and one participant answered this question from the Islamic banking point of view. The bank's employee stressed that for Islamic banking, communication is very different and more based on conferences and other finance events (relationship-based communication is emphasised).

It started in 2000 and we participate to various Islamic body, like Islamic finance board and we communicate a lot through conferences since it is a nascent industry, lots of conferences worldwide on Islamic finance not only in the Islamic world but also in the States, Europe, France.... (RP05)

The responses given by the interviewees legitimised part of the research method being based on visual media as they all seem to agree on the importance of billboards and visual communication in the region. The importance of understanding the mechanism of culture within the bank's visual communication media is essential as it has been recognised that billboards and other visuals are still the most preferred communication tool in the region.

4.2 'The Logo'

Introduction of the bank's origin and nationality

Since its inception, BNP Paribas has transformed itself. From a bank originating in France, it has become an international banking group, today considered to be European in identity and worldwide in ambition. Initially consisting of the free-flying curve, the visual identity of BNP Paribas has been adapted to the group's development (through acquisitions and expansion), and has sometimes taken on disparate forms. Since 2008, BNP Paribas has converged all its identities and affirmed its logotype with the establishment of the 'Brand Block'. The Bank tried to find a logo that would be in

harmony with the national origin of the bank and its European acquisitions as well as its international ambitions, visions and mission.

Interview content on the bank's cultural identity

In the interviews it became evident that the national identity of the bank was not explicit. When interviewees were asked: With which (national) culture do you associate the bank you work for? Responses were diverse. Two of the bank's employees straight away defined the bank as French. Both interviewees gave different reasons however why they described BNP Paribas as French. One of them explained it by the internal structure of the bank's management. The internal hierarchy and organisation of the bank seems to be an important parameter in understanding the bank's culture. This interviewee defined the bank as French because its management structure is mainly male oriented and predominantly constituted of white males which reflected the French cultural management.

For the other bank's employee, the bank was French due to its name. The name BNP Paribas (Banque National de Paris) and Paribas has a strong French resonance. Other than the name the participant acknowledged the difficulties in stating that the bank is French through its visuals or logo as it appeared to be quite universal. The logo and bank's visuals did not offer explicit symbols that might allow stakeholders or shareholders to define the bank as French.

The other communication professionals described the bank as European with a strong international presence. The reasons given included BNP Paribas being represented in different countries around the world. The communication practitioners understood that it was a French bank originally but, with its European acquisitions, it had become a European bank. For instance, one said:

Our bank BNP is very strong in this domestic market which is France but now a very strong European bank. I consider my bank as a European bank with a very strong international presence. (RP05).

As a result, these professionals found it inaccurate to define the bank as only French as they perceived BNP Paribas as more European. One communication professional

clearly stated: 'I don't want to say French' (RP02) when I referred to the bank's identity.

Communication practitioners all agreed that it was a French bank by its nationality but the principal identity was European as it mostly operated in Europe although it had been established in many different countries across the globe. The bank's identity then appears to be more complex than expected, as it did not just encompass a French national identity but more an identity defined by its propagation in Europe and its international market acquisitions. In regards to the communication professionals' answers, the bank's identity appeared to have multiple facets and had adopted multiple identities according to the country where it operated, with a strong European identity. The logo will remain the same but other visuals, such as advertising, calendars and brochures are likely to use different visual strategies relevant to the country where the bank has been established. Thus, one interviewee commented:

European culture the bank is a global bank; represented in all countries around the world and in each of these countries our approach is quite local. (RP02)

The logo's visuals declension



(Figure 4.1: BNP Paribas's logo)

BNP Paribas Najmah is the Islamic bank created in 2000 in Bahrain.



(Figure 4.2: BNP Paribas Najmah)

BNP Paribas's strip logo, displayed in some visuals and on the bank's website.



(Figure 4.3: BNP Paribas's strip logo)

The logo BNP Paribas can be represented in different forms: the simple logo, the strip logo and the logo branded Najmah. In each representation the visuals are the same (the green square) and the name of the bank always appears. In Figure 4.1, the BNP Paribas's logo has two different elements: the typography and the green square with forms that does not follow a particular geometrical form. The BNP Paribas's typeface is recognisable within the logo, as it does not only provide the name of the company but is an original typeface especially created for the bank. The typeface has been copyrighted and so it is the footprint, the bank's recognisable stamp. The corporate identity partly represented through the logo and slogan has not been adapted to the country in which the bank operates.

The Logo's 'linguistic message'

The linguistic message brings a new dimension to the logo. In figure 4.3, the linguistic message does not have an anchorage⁴ role; it supports the logo's visual values that are not explicitly expressed. The slogan, 'The bank for a changing world' sounds like a battle cry or a leitmotiv⁵. It is significant that the slogan is in the English language and not in Arabic as English is the language of business in the Middle East. 'The bank for a changing world' suggests that BNP Paribas is a bank internationally recognised, able to adapt itself to the world and the future. Thus, the slogan emphasises a concept of adaptation and the notion that it is the bank of the future. It can also be interpreted as a bank that understands its people, customers and, more generally, the world. The slogan tends to communicate an optimistic vision of the future.

The Logo 'pure image'

The denoted image is defined by the forms, lines and colour of the logo as well as its representation. The colour code of the bank is green and white. Green especially is the emblematic colour. The logo design is modern with its perspectives and different reliefs. The 'brand block' is a green square that contains white free-flying curves. The white free-flying curves appear to at first to be stars that fly away to become a bird. The visual logo here can have different interpretations and meanings depending on the cultural perspective people use to define it.

The Logo's 'connoted image'

The connoted image shows mixed symbols. The positioning of the emblem in all figures embodies a release of the bird star towards the outside, opening out toward the future, symbolising and stressing positive renewal. The bird represents freedom, flexibility and ambition as it is positioned toward the sky, and upward, which transmits a positive and optimistic message to stress on the idea of security and protection that

⁴ The anchorage function or (ancrage in French) first introduced by Roland Barthes, means (in a linguistic message) that the text directs the reader between the different signifieds of the image, it guides the reader towards a meaning chosen in advance in relation to the image.

⁵ Literally meaning 'guiding motif'. It is a musical term referencing to recurrent themes associated to a particular idea or concept.

the bank is able to provide to its customers and other shareholders. The fact that the logo represents curves and flexibility breaks with the image of a rigid, classic and formal bank. The stars represent success, sovereignty and security. Moreover, the star is a figure of an astronomical, astrological, quite aerial, universe visible in an open space and part of a constellation with identifiable shapes located in its own network. A star can help verify a direction. Thus, the polar star has often been used to determine direction and never misleads one as to the position of the North Pole or our own position. Stars can represent both something quite distant but also something close and personal. Stars can be seen as something magical and dreamy that will protect, which would be in contradiction with Islamic beliefs that do not accept the concept of magic. For instance, in Western culture we tend to believe in our star or being born under a lucky star. The image of a star is universal; it is a symbol easily recognisable and identifiable (Floch, 2001). In this context, the BNP Paribas's logo reinforces the slogan and vice versa. 'The bank for a changing world' with the symbol of the star highlights the message and the idea that it is a bank that you can count on, BNP Paribas will not mislead you as the image of the star suggests, it will always be able to guide you whatever changes the world goes through.

According to the magazine *Stratégies. Fr*, the logo of BNP Paribas is called 'taking flight'. The stars refer to Europe and universality. The stars confined in the green square can be reminiscent of the European flag. The transformation of the stars into birds evokes openness, freedom, development, the ability to evolve and adapt. The rounded movement of the curve is the logo off to the world of the living. The green square represents nature and optimism.

Interview content on description of the Bank's visual identity

During the interview, participants were asked how they would describe the visual identity of the bank and to what extent they think this identity is culturally related. Professional workers defined the visual identity of the bank, in direct reference to the logo and other visuals such as advertisements differently. Interviewees used different symbols or words to describe the visual identity. Most of them did not see a link between the visual identity of the bank, its logo and advertisements with its national

culture (French), wider culture (European) or Middle Eastern culture. The concept of culture within the bank's visual identity was not recognised by the communication professionals. They seemed to understand the visual identity of the bank as quite universal in its design. According to them, these visuals were more likely to represent an international concept rather than a specific culture. Furthermore, all professionals used different adjectives to describe the bank's visual identity and logo. None of them used a common definition of the potential values portrait of the bank's logo. One of the respondents even found the logo quite ambiguous and had difficulty in describing it.

It is stars but we don't know if it represents stars, doves or birds, or even stars that become doves or the opposite we don't really know so I wouldn't associate it with the Gulf culture. (RPO3)

One communication professional described the logo as a symbolic representation of the bank's expansion in the world. The fact that the logo presented a curvy design that expanded can be seen as a metaphoric representation of the bank's market acquisitions. The logo would in this case express the bank's vision and mission.

In fact it is something which is expanding; I mean the vision of the bank or financial group expanding worldwide. (RP05)

For another interviewee, the bank's visual identity was mainly defined through the adjective 'high'. The respondent stated:

I think the visual identity of the bank is one of prestige. It is very high level it is something that kind of emanates high quality. (RP04)

The visual identity portrayed the bank as a prestigious institution and was consistent in carrying this message, according to the communication professionals.

Two of the interviewees used the same qualities to describe the bank's visual identity. For both, the bank's visual identity was modern and based mainly on human elements.

It is about people for most of the communication. It is more international with people from different areas and regions so it is more about people than culture and specific culture. (RP01)

Only one of the professionals linked the bank's visual identity with a cultural European design. The respondent claimed that because the visual identity followed a contemporary approach in its design and represented people, it could be more easily related to Europe than the Arabic culture because the latter tended to be more traditionalists in its design approach and advertisements.

It was clear, then, that the logo was described differently by each of the participants and offered many possible interpretations. One professional did relate it to the bank's mission and vision. However, the human element was highlighted as an important element recurrent within the bank's visuals. Yet, even though some cultural features can be included in visuals the participants did not perceive it is a main element. They did not relate the bank's visuals to a specific culture but rather saw it as universal with elements that could fit into different cultures. The cultural concept then, did not appear as one of the main characteristics in the definition of the bank's logo.

The 'Najmah Logo'

BNP Paribas Najmah (see Figure 4.2) is a branded logo especially conceived for Islamic banking of the BNP Paribas in Bahrain. The typeface is the same as the typeface used by the bank. The linguistic message Najmah does not just have an Arabic consonance; in Arabic 'najmah' means 'star'. The bank kept its identity and one of its emblematic visuals, the stars. They associated their linguistic message with their visual identity in order to provide consistency between both the conventional and the Islamic bank. The name was chosen to fit with the logo as well as the values that it portrays. Najmah represents the bridge between the European identity of the bank and the Bahraini, and, more generally, the Islamic identity. The name was chosen because of its meanings in both cultures: European (French), and Middle Eastern. The signified Najmah, meaning, star is a very important symbol for both religions: Christian (Catholic) and Muslim. It is to be remembered that France was originally a Catholic

country where Christianity and the Catholic Church played a very important role in the country's history and identity. It was often said that France was '*la petite soeur de l'Eglise*' (the little sister of the Church).

Moreover, the colour codes of the bank, green and white, both have positive meaning in Arabic and European culture. In Islam and in Christianity, the colour white is often believed to symbolise purity and peace. For example, many Muslims wear the colour white when they attend Friday prayers. For Catholics white represents purity as women dress in white for their wedding and priests are dressed in white during church services. It may be a coincidence, but green is the colour of Islam. According to Muslims, the colour green symbolises nature and life. In the Qur'an⁶ (Surah 76:21) it is said that the inhabitants of paradise will wear green garments of fine silk. The colour green has been considered especially Islamic for centuries. Crusaders avoided using any green in their coats of arms, so that they could not possibly be mistaken for their Muslim opponents in the heat of battle (Singer, 2010). It is also important to notice that the star is one of the symbols of Islam along with the crescent moon. The crescent and star had been used in pre-Islamic South Arabia as a symbol and in coinage (Thompson, 1944).

Therefore, the symbol is not Muslim in origin. Rather, it was a polytheistic icon adopted during the spread of Islam and the crescent was not a symbol used for Islam by Muhammad or any other early Muslim rulers, as the Islamic religion is, in fact, against appointing holy symbols (Hayes, 2007). BNP Paribas created this brand with the idea of building a bridge between both cultures and gathering the values of both into one: a bank close to its people, a bank able to adapt to other cultures. Thus, the star within the bank is a recurrent symbol; we will see later how it can be used differently in the various bank visual communication media.

In regard to the creation of the Najmah brand and the analysis of its symbolic dimension within the Muslim world, we can highlight that in this context, the bank had to adapt and include a symbolic Islamic dimension within its communication. The following interview analysis highlights the difficulties for some professionals to

⁶ Surah is a division of the Qu'ran and can be approximately referred as a chapter

acknowledge the religious dimension of the bank in Bahrain that can be partly explained by the fact that the bank's main activities in the region are conventional and not Islamic. Najmah then appears as an exception within the bank's representation of Islamic culture in terms of religion.

Interview content on the question of Islamic symbols within the bank's visuals

Given the above analysis, it was interesting to note that most of the interviewees believed that the bank was not really using Islamic symbols in its communication media. Although communication professionals associated the term 'Islamic symbol' with the idea of religious symbols and acknowledged the use of cultural symbols in relation, they did not see the symbols as religious in nature. One bank employee categorically stated that Islamic symbols were used within the bank's communication media. Others referred to the Eid and Ramadan cards as the only communication visuals that directly used Islamic symbols but other than that, interviewees stated that the bank only adapted its communication media by integrating cultural symbols such as the use of an Arabic model wearing traditional dress in their advertisements but nothing specifically religious in nature.

We do adapt to the Islamic market so the people were wearing the local clothes and they were Arabs and they were mainly males as it is very difficult to put in an advertisement in Saudi when a woman is not completely or being appropriately dressed. (RP02)

One communication practitioner also referred to the importance of translating in to Arabic the bank's various statements and linguistic messages but denied that it is correlated with the idea of implementing Islamic symbols within the bank's communication media. However, one bank employee recognised a direct use of Islamic elements within the Islamic bank's communication strategy. According to the interviewee (RP05), the fact that the bank has created the brand Najmah which is symbolically related to the Muslim religion, as well as the representation and mention of the Sharia board within its communication media (its brochure) was part of the construction of Islamic symbols.

We communicate a lot on the quality of our Sharia board, to gain the confidence of our clientele. We selected our 3 scholars according to nationality, because in Islam you have several schools of thoughts, we selected one Saudi, one Bahraini and one from Malaysia... We communicate the names of our scholars through our brochure and also during interviews with journalists. (RP05).

Communicating strategically Islamic symbols within the bank's communication was not obvious, as they appear in a certain context or for specific communication media. Since no obvious communication has been made to particularly communicate with the Islamic clients (except Najmah) the researcher tried to understand what strategy is used to acquire credibility in the local market from both the conventional and Islamic bank's perspectives. Therefore, the following question was asked: Is there a specific marketing and communication strategy that the bank uses to create brand loyalty in the Islamic market? It was interesting to note that the communication professionals all understood the question from an Islamic banking perspective. With the exception of Islamic banking products that are purely designed in harmony with Islamic religious precepts, as well as more general Islamic beliefs and traditions, no specific communication strategies have been developed in order to communicate Islamic banking.

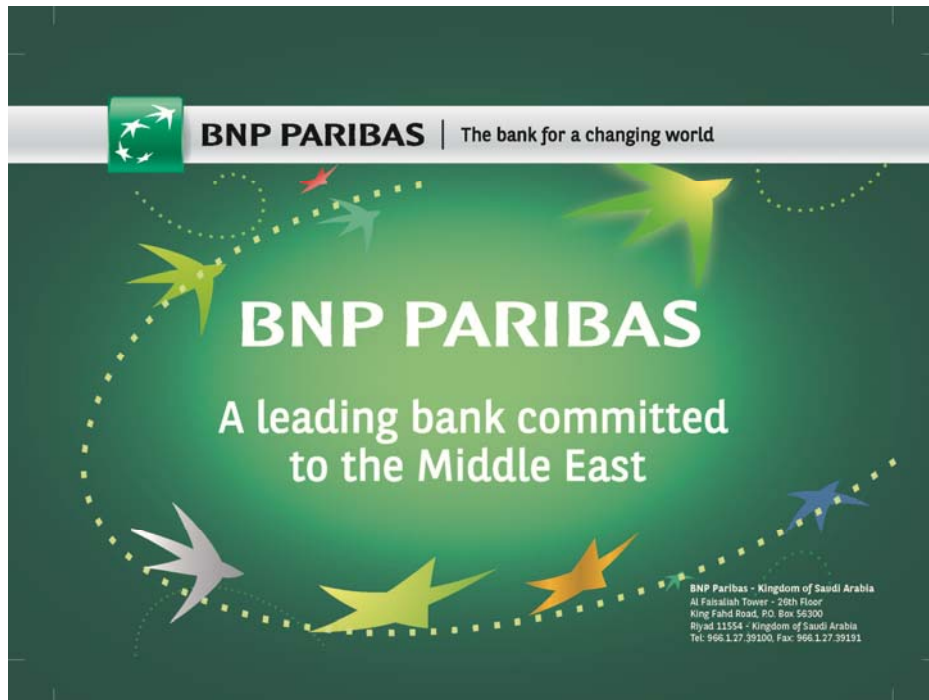
The majority of communication practitioners were not aware of any Islamic banking communication plans and none of them had worked to create a communication strategy for this purpose. One of the interviewees said that there was no communication plan that has been created for the Islamic bank for cultural reasons. According to this bank employee, the idea of integrating religious symbols within visual communication would be in contradiction with the French way of communication, as France is secular and is very sensitive to the question of secularisation in public workplaces. Communicating on Islamic banking would imply potential religious references, as they sell religious products, and this would be in opposition with the French ideology of not mixing religion and business.

It is very French to not mix religion and business, the proof is if you look at the evolution of the Islamic bank in France and in England, in England it evolves in a more rapid and deep way than in France. In France we are not very comfortable with the idea to associate religion with business where in England they overcome this fear. (RPO4)

But two communication professionals mentioned specific communication tools that have been created for the Islamic bank to promote their brand Najmah. One communication practitioner mentioned a brochure that has been specially produced for Najmah and which is designed to be in harmony with Arabic design. The other interviewee referred to the creation of Islamic banking in 2003 in order to respond to their clientele's demands within the Islamic market. In 2005 the brand Najmah was created to reinforce the bank's identity among their Islamic clientele in order to facilitate brand loyalty.

In 2000 we realised that Islamic banking was enduring a strong development and therefore being one of the main international player in this region we had to offer to our clientele Islamic products...financing Islamic products but also, Islamic placement products...so in 2003 we decided to set up a dedicated Islamic banking unit and later to reinforce our presence in Islamic banking and create momentum and visual identity of the Islamic financing. In 2005 we decided to grant this Islamic banking Najmah, just to be better perceived by our Islamic clientele. (RP05)

The 'Middle Eastern' Logo advertisement



(Figure 4.4: BNP Paribas Middle East logo)

One variation of the logo is the one especially used in the Middle East. The bank is advertised in the Middle East through this visual, mainly constituted of the bank's emblematic stars and bird as well as the bank emblematic colour green.

The linguistic message

The linguistic message 'A leading bank committed to the Middle East' does not have an anchorage purpose. In this context, the linguistic message adds information to the picture and is essential to create meaning. Without the linguistic message we wouldn't be able to sense the purpose of this advertisement. We would know that it is the BNP Paribas Bank if we were familiar with it and its logo. Here, the Bank sets its values: trustworthiness, honesty, commitment and responsiveness. In using this statement, BNP Paribas places itself as a recognised bank that has proven their ability to adapt themselves to the country in which they operate and succeed. 'Leading bank' suggests

that the bank has built a good reputation over the years and that the Bank is able to respond to the region's needs in financial matters. The word 'commitment' represents one of the Bank's values and emphasises the idea that the Bank is to be responsive and capable of answering, solving or proposing financial products for the Middle East. The advertisement is local and has been standardised for the region.

The 'denoted image'

The denoted image portrays the main corporate visual identity of the bank; the stars flying away like birds. The image presents the bank's logo as well as some dotted lines surrounding the linguistic message and the name of the bank. The flying stars/birds have different colours such as green, orange, blue and purple. In fact, the different colours that constitute the image are not unified. They present gradation and nuances that give more foreground and add brightness to the advertisement. Likewise, the advertisement presents different curvy elements that are in line with the stars/birds. It is important to note that the animal as a representation in the bank's logo does not cause any interpretation problem for the Islamic culture. The emblematic visuals of the bank which are the stars and birds seem to follow the curvy trajectory of the lines. The dominant colour is green with a gradation of the green on the different elements of the picture. Thus, in the middle of the advertisement, where the written message appears, is much lighter than the general background. The light green colour encircles the linguistic message.

The 'connoted image'

The connoted image presents different signs, appropriate to the bank's identity. The colours and their nuances and gradation give a certain foreground and dimension to the image. The advertisement proposes a very colourful representation of the BNP Paribas's visual identity. This colourful representation of the logo as well as the multiplicity of the stars/birds flying away in a curvy trajectory brings energy and a festive mood that breaks with the general image of a bank's rigidity. Again, the curvy elements of the advertisement bring a concept of flexibility and freedom within a delineated frame. The direction taken by the flying stars/birds always follows an

upward trajectory which transmits a positive message. The Bank looks at the future and carries ambitions for the region. Moreover, the dotted lines show and guide the trajectory of the stars in creating this circle surrounding the linguistic message which stresses where the reader should focus. The message being surrounded by the BNP Paribas name, lines and the Bank's symbols stress the idea of protection provided by the curves and stars/birds that enclose the message and can, at the same time, symbolise the idea that the bank has lucky stars. This interpretation is taken from the researcher's French/European perspective as the concept of 'lucky star' is a very Western idea. In the special arrangement of the different elements that constitutes the visual we can see the metaphor of a planet, or a galaxy, where the stars/birds and lines are representative of a network.

The different logos (brands) and visuals create the possibility of potential cultural interactions and even potential tensions between the Bank's multiple identities in terms of cultural origin (French) and the culture of the country (Bahraini) in which it operates. The following interviews and visual analysis will provide the reader with an overview of cultural interactions between the Bank's national culture and the Middle Eastern, Bahraini culture.

Interview content on the cultural interaction between the bank's origin and its development in the Middle East

To the question: 'Is the bank's identity influenced by the Islamic culture in Bahrain?' respondents had different views on how the bank's identity was potentially influenced by the Islamic culture in Bahrain. The majority of the bank's employees recognised a possible influence but it was not always obvious. Two communication professionals acknowledged an obvious influence of the Bahraini culture and the Islamic culture on the bank's communication media. The two other professionals were more nuanced in their answers as they believed the impact of the Bahraini culture on BNP Paribas was not that significant. One interviewee responded negatively to the question and did not think that the Islamic culture in Bahrain influenced the bank's identity in any way.

The two communication practitioners who agreed that the Islamic Bahraini culture influenced BNP Paribas's communication had different perspectives however; one said

that the Bank's identity was influenced internally by the Islamic Bahraini culture. According to this professional, the Bank adapted itself to accommodate Muslim employees. Thus, prayer rooms had been made available as well as special hours during Ramadan to allow Muslims employees to celebrate fasting and also to make working hours easier. It also organised religious events such as the ending of the fast (Eid). Even though efforts were made and potential influence can be noted, they did not promote Islam.

The bank is flexible, I think there is a respect of the religion in one way, but we do not promote Islam. I don't think it is the purpose because we are here first for the business but at the same time we are aware of the local specificities and of people's culture that we respect in a neutral manner. (RP04)

The other respondents recognised an influence of the Bahraini culture on the Bank's communication media but did not recognise any impact of Islam as such. Within advertising, a number of elements had been adapted to the culture such as the representation of locals in traditional dress, but, because Bahrain is more moderate than, for instance, Saudi Arabia, the bank did not need to adapt its visuals from a purely Islamic perspective. In some way the Bank's identity was clearly influenced by the Bahraini culture which is mostly highlighted through the Bank's advertising campaigns but is not necessarily impacted by Islam as a religion.

We can continue communications with local culture without pushing it further into Islam, we don't have to highlight Islam; we have to highlight the local. (RP01)

But two other communication practitioners did not think the Islamic Bahraini culture had that much impact on the Bank's identity. According to these interviewees, the Bank's identity was rarely influenced by the Bahraini culture except for some specific situations or cases. For one of the interviewees, the specific cases or situations when the Islamic Bahraini culture strongly influences the Bank's identity is during and for the creation of Ramadan and Eid cards and Islamic banking where they tend to highlight the Islamic culture, such as for the Najmah brochure. For the other interviewee, the specific case concerned the 'Keep Reaching' campaign where they adapted to the region, by representing Arabs in local clothes and in local places. The interviewee went

further in mentioning cultural and legal problems they faced with the campaign's taglines due to the country's political situation. This will be explained further within the problems of cultural miscommunication (see Chapter 2 on Miscommunication). Generally, these communication professionals did not think the Bahraini/Islamic culture had a profound impact on the Bank's identity.

I don't think the bank's corporate identity is influenced on the whole I think we have to make exceptions for some cases. (RP03)

Rarely because we follow more the European culture. However, at the year during Ramadan we do cards, whenever somebody passes away we send condolence letters and in some of these things we use the Islamic culture. (RP02)

BNP Paribas mostly operates in the region as a conventional bank and Islamic banking is not considered an important part of their Bahraini market. As a result, the influence of the Islamic culture of Bahrain is restricted with regard to its impact on the bank's corporate identity.

BNP is a conventional bank, our main activities in the Middle East are conventional banking, not Islamic banking. (RP05)

In regards to cultural interaction and influence within the Bank's identity, the researcher asked the respondents if they were aware of any differences between the French origin of the Bank and how it had adapted itself to the Islamic market. If so, what were these?

This question appears to continue on from preceding questions as participants had already mentioned the Bank's adaptation to Middle Eastern culture and the influence of the Bank's European identity. It is not a local Bank so there is an effort to accommodate the country in which BNP Paribas operates but the European/French origin is still very present. For the respondents, there were no significant differences between the French origin of the brand and how it has adapted to the Islamic market. The logo remained the same and the general European guidelines in regards to the bank's visual communication over the world are the same.

One communication practitioner suggested that in terms of industry, if one looked specifically at Islamic banking from a technical point of view, then, yes, it was very

different as Islamic banks do not speculate, interest is forbidden and they do not look for profits. Other than that, the bank was seen to operate in harmony with its culture of origin and the culture of Bahrain.

Another communication professional had trouble in defining the bank as French. The interviewee did not think it was relevant to talk about its French origin. According to this communication practitioner, the bank was European and thus took a European perspective despite efforts to adapt itself to the local Islamic culture of Bahrain.

It is not so much French because the bank had a French perception but now it is a European perception [...] Basically, the bank has evolved a lot from a communication point of view and it has started to adapt itself to local markets and an example of that is the latest 'Keep Reaching' campaign that was adapted to most markets including the Islamic market. (RP02)

In contrast, yet another Bank's employee did see the Bank as very French in its approach to business although it had an international presence. The interviewee claimed that the Bank was aware of local specificities but remained French. Another communication practitioner agreed with this statement and acknowledged the fact that even though they had a dedicated Islamic branch in BNP Paribas, the bank remained French. Its origin was still strong despite its adaptation to local markets and Islamic demands.

In addition, this communication professional did not think it to be relevant to communicate as a French bank in the region but that the origin of the Bank was important because Bahrainis did not trust local banks since the unrest.

I don't think communicating as a French bank in the region will benefit. The only thing that will benefit is that after the unrest (reference to the Arab Spring), this is an international bank reliable and trustworthy, other local banks may be in jeopardy with the unrest. Some people I know moved their money outside Bahrain, they are thinking of shifting their money from local to international banks for one reason is that stability and the local banks are related to the government. (RP01)

Thus, the Arab Spring which has been taking place since March 2012 has provoked a wave of demonstrations and unrest. Protesters have been arrested by military and

police, and the population have faced difficulties in expressing their opinions and dissatisfaction.

4.3 Analysis of Advertisements and other visuals

'Le Petit Prince'



Figure 4.5: le Petit Prince

Background: This advertisement called 'Le Petit Prince' was launched in 2003 at the same time the Islamic bank was created. This advertisement was used for both the conventional and Islamic bank in Bahrain and has been translated in to Arabic.

The linguistic message

The linguistic message in this advertisement reinforces the bank's symbolic values of future, ambition, family ties, and relationship-based communication portrayed through the various elements that constitute the picture. It makes explicit the Bank's values and the advertisement's symbolic dimension of a secure future. The first sentence 'When you expand your horizons, look for the banking partner that can accompany you to your destination' strengthens the idea that BNP Paribas is the bank of the world, an international institution capable of moving across borders. BNP Paribas operates without national boundaries which are implicitly linked with the symbolic dimension of freedom. Also, 'the banking partner that can accompany you to your destination' stresses the importance of the relationship between the Bank and its clients, a bank close and loyal to its people. Notable is the personification of the BNP Paribas with the term 'partner' and the verb 'accompany'.

The second sentence 'with BNP Paribas, you can rely upon a top-notch financial group that offers a world of financial expertise for individuals and businesses, from private banking to corporate lending, from corporate finance to the capital markets, from international trade and project finance to Islamic banking' resets the bank's fundamental values of being trustworthy and having commitment. This long sentence aims to enumerate BNP Paribas's different financial services, an enumeration that shows the capacity and the field of expertise and products that the bank can offer to the world. The enumeration reasserts the idea of a worldwide bank able to provide worldwide services. The fourth sentence 'you will find our banking network of recognised specialists across the whole of the Gulf region' reasserts the importance of the gulf region for the Bank as well as its integration through its 'network'. Here we understand the sentence through a reaffirmation of the logo's interpretation made earlier of the BNP Paribas's stars creating a network (see Figure 4.4). Finally, the last sentence 'BNP Paribas, focused on your future' re-optimises the main leitmotiv and message of the Bank and the concept and theme of the advertisement – 'an ambitious bank for an ambitious region' – that will help one look positively to one's future. This last sentence has an implicit anchorage function: it focuses the advertisement's symbolic dimension and theme of the future represented by the stars and flying birds

as well as the figure of the Arabic child pointing to the future. Here the future is understood through the concept of ambition. The text becomes redundant within the theme and symbols.

The denoted image

The denoted image or primary, natural subject matter consists of two males, an adult and a young boy, looking at each other. The young boy points to the sky, which shows the stars and the BNP Paribas's logo. They are seated on a globe, which represents the Earth. The dominant colour is a dark blue night graduated in the second half of the image with the globe and the two males seated, to become a brighter blue. Thus, the stars and the BNP Paribas's logo bring brightness to the sky. We can notice three gleams of bright blue colours which represent the focus point for the reader highlighting three main elements, namely the Bank's logo, the two males and the countries of the globe. It is also interesting to note that the emblematic colour of the BNP Paribas's logo has been replaced by white almost certainly for aesthetic reasons.

The 'connoted image'

The secondary or conventional subject matter analysis brings the researcher to a more precise analysis and to detect the underlying symbolic code particular to a culture. In this context, the advertisement portrays a young child and an adult from the Middle East. Both wear the traditional dress of Arabs living in the Middle East. Traditional dress in Bahrain for men consists of the *thobe* which includes the headdress *keffiyeh*, *ghutra* and *agal* (a thick, double, black cord that is worn on the top of the *ghutra* to hold it in place). The *thobe* is a square scarf made of cotton, folded in a triangle, and worn over the *keffiyeh* (a white knitted skull cap worn under the *ghutra*). In Bahrain, it is usually red and white checked or all white. Women in Bahrain tend to wear the veil and the *abaya* (a black dress that covers all parts of their body). In Bahrain men usually wear the traditional dress for the prayer day on Friday although many wear Western clothes during the week.

The infinity theme given in this advertisement is stressed by the space arrangement of the picture. The Earth on which the young boy and the man are seated constitutes the first half of the image; the second half is represented by the sky, with the bank's logo and its linguistic message. The Earth is not limited by the frame of the image. The extension of the sky within the advertisement is infinite and seems to give a greater dimension to the picture. The sky encompasses the Earth and the two males in its notion of infinity. The expansion of the Earth reinforces the idea of continuity within the advertisement regarding its space and time dimension. The child and the adult are seated on the top of the Earth, around South Eastern Europe which allows the Arab Gulf to be one of the focus points in this advertisement.

The Arab Gulf is well represented; we can distinctly see it as a large land mass located just behind the two males. The fact that they are seated on the top of the Earth, gives the idea that they have power and control over their destiny. The image of them seated on the globe pointing to the stars in the sky could be the metaphor of a very Western dream which consists in 'reaching the stars', and so being in control of one's destiny and feeling that nothing is impossible. However, it is understood that the Arabs do not believe in a control of their destiny as they often use the word '*In shallah*' which means if God wants (God willing). There are two possible interpretations – the stars are close to God and so could bring luck or, the stars in the advertisement suggest that the child and the man have control over their destiny (if they choose BNP Paribas as a partner) which would be in contradiction with the Arab belief. The stars pointed out by the child can represent the idea of a secure future; a lucky star that will guide. It is also a reminder that Bahrain civilisation originates from the Berbers (indigenous people of Africa) who used the stars as guides in the desert. Within the Berber culture, the stars were fundamental in their ability to locate north and south, and know when to pray. The symbolic metaphor of the Berber culture is very strong in this advertisement. There is a direct reference to this tribal culture through local dress, and the representation of the Earth and stars. The idea of the advertisement could be summed up in the following, instead of looking at the stars to guide them; they will look at the BNP Paribas's star logo as a substitute to ensure a good and secure future.

In the advertisement, the sky and the young child symbolise the future. The protagonists are almost portrayed as superhuman, close to God or at least they are represented as superior as they sit on the top of the Earth. The Arab man and the child look close, their hands touch on the Earth, they are smiling at each other with the idea that they look to a bright future together. This fits with the theories that within Arab communication, Middle Easterners tend to touch, and use physical contact. The dominant colour of dark blue adds a dimension of wisdom and calm. The slight strip of bright blue coming from the top of the Earth also suggests that it is the time of a sunset or sunrise, important in the Muslim life as it is prayer time.

The 'intrinsic meaning'

The intrinsic meaning focuses on the cultural context of the image. Here I will define the artistic style arising out of the cultural context. The advertisement title 'Le Petit Prince' is an explicit French reference to a famous French book written in 1943 by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The book is written like a children's book but comprises many allegories. It is a poetic and psychological fairy-tale where every chapter recounts an adventure of the little prince meeting with various humans. Even though it uses simple language, 'Le petit prince' proposes a symbolic conception of life. According to Galembert (2000), the sentence '*On ne voit bien qu'avec le coeur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux*' ('One sees clearly only with the heart. What is essential is invisible to the eye') is seen as the spirit of the story. The French reference in the title brings a strong poetic dimension to the advertisement. In the advertisement, the little prince is Arabic and interacts with an Arabic adult man (maybe his father). We can notice some symbolic similarities with the book. For instance, the child in the advertisement could be a metaphoric version of the little prince. Like the little prince, the Arabic child could come from another planet or asteroid to begin its learning process on Earth with the help of the adult man. In the book, the little prince lives on an asteroid and arrived on Earth to discover human life, but the human of Saint-Exupéry is a kind of superhuman, which does not correspond with the Islamic religion that only accepts the idea of superhuman in regard to Allah.

The recurrent image of the planet in the book is evident as well as the interaction of the little prince with other humans. Thus in the advert, the meeting of the child and

the adult on the top of the Earth reflects the main theme of the book. The idea of relationships is fundamental in the book as well as the Bank's communication strategy. Furthermore, this fits with what has been highlighted before; the Arab world and the Middle East are defined, identified and described as a relationship-based region.

This advertisement takes a local approach and has been standardised for the region. Therefore, even though it is standardised it still incorporates a French touch with the implicit reference to the French novel 'Le Petit Prince' and a Westernised approach regarding symbolic dimensions portrayed in the advertising. The figure of the Arab child brings to the advertisement a conception of innocence, the idea of discovery widely used as main themes within the 'Le Petit Prince'. The child is also the metaphoric representation of the future.

‘Wealth management advertisement campaign’



Figure 4.6: Wealth Management

Background: This campaign was launched for the bank's wealth management department in 2010 and published in the Middle East.

The 'linguistic message'

The written message is very long in this advertisement and aims to provide information on the bank's services regarding wealth management. 'When it comes to your future there is no time like the present' is an interesting slogan. The typeface is very classical, old fashioned. The typeface suggests that the advertisement targets important and wealthy clients. The notion of present and future are essential; you build your future in the present. The text below the slogan is redundant and just adds detailed information. The sentence 'Secure your future today with BNP Paribas Wealth Management' reiterates the concept of future that the Bank emphasises in every advertisement. This phrase encourages the client to take action regarding their finances. The idea of security and a trustworthy bank is highlighted. 'BNP Paribas, the leading private bank in the Euro Zone puts specialised experts at your service' anchors the fact that the Bank has a good reputation and has had good results in the 'Euro Zone'. This statement's purpose is to provide information on the Bank's reputation and performance in Europe. The Bank states that they are recognised in Europe as a leading bank, which reaffirms their legitimacy in regards to their Middle Eastern clients. 'We work with you to help in your plan and put into effect a personalised investment strategy that works at every stage of your life' assures clients and reinforces the idea that the bank is a life partner that personalises clients needs and is able to propose personalised services. 'Personalised investment' resonates within the sentence to put the client at the forefront. BNP Paribas's message stresses the bank's ability in carrying on a personal relationship with their clients.

The sentence 'at every stage of your life' could be easily associated to the general meaning of the Bank's slogan 'the bank for a changing world' in the sense that the Bank will accompany clients through world and life changes represented here by 'every stage of your life'. The last sentence, 'Now more than ever we are committed to you and we are committed to your future' encloses the text by reasserting one of the bank's key values – commitment – and by relocating in a time scale the Bank's ambitions. The repetition of the verb 'committed' aims to stress the Bank's main value and ensure that it is reinforced in the reader's mind. BNP Paribas wants to place itself in the action and finish the text with the assertive sentence 'now more than ever' almost giving an order.

The 'denoted image'

The denoted image or primary, natural subject matter analysis represented in the advertisement is three men in bright surroundings. The background shows typical Arabic elements. We can see an Arabic lamp which is often representative of the Arabic architectural style as well as a glimpse of an Arabian mirror as the shape of the mirror is often associated to Arab designs. The two older men portrayed in this advertisement have a formal pose; they look and smile at each other. On the extreme left side of the picture, we can see a young Arab adult followed by a middle-aged Bahraini man in traditional dress and on his right a middle-aged Western man wearing a formal western business suit. The young Arab man stands while the two other are seated. The young man looks very relaxed as he wears casual clothes, some of his shirt buttons are open, and his right hand is in his pocket while his other arm rests on the chair behind the middle-aged Arab man. The Westerner is signing a paper or documents while the two other Arab men look at him as if he is the centre of the attention. The overall picture describes a partnership within a business context.

The 'connoted image'

The secondary, conventional subject matter or the connoted analysis proposes a deeper understanding of the symbols within this image. Each of the three protagonists corresponds to a symbol. The young Arab symbolises the future and could easily be associated with the sentence 'when it comes to your future'. He speaks for the future as he is dressed in Western clothes; often worn by the younger Middle Eastern generation. He has a casual posture which could mean that he is quite confident about the future.

The three men are smiling at each other which provide a sense of closeness between them. Again, a major recurrent theme and concept is tackled, the relationship and harmony between the West and the Middle East. The two other men symbolise the

present; they are the builders of the future. The three men are positioned as if they are following a certain hierarchy (from the youngest to the oldest) bringing a generational dimension to the picture. It seems that the theme of generation is also highlighted in this advertisement. The theme is reinforced by a possible familial affiliation between the young Arab and the middle-aged Arab. As has been outlined in the literature review, family is a very important part of the Arab tradition and culture. In the Arab society, status is often defined through family and in-groups. Moreover, the fact that the young Arab stands and the two other men are seated directly refers to the Western and Eastern cultural value of respect, represented here by the action of letting the older men be seated.

The background gives little information of the context. The background is constituted of bright light and soft focus. The soft focus makes it difficult to define the elements constituting the background and blurs the background which places focus on the key image: the three men and the themes of alliance and relationship between East and West, as well as family and the generations.

The 'intrinsic meaning'

The intrinsic meaning or content focus, defining the cultural context of the picture, comes through the artistic style used. According to Douglis (2005), a portrait must be more than just a description of a human face, it must highlight the character and personality of the subject represented and tells a story about it. As for most of the advertisement, the portrait is posed. In this context, the picture presents a *mimesis* portrait. The mimesis portrait usually offers a depiction of a drawing or human faces close to reality. A mimesis portrait provides high degree fidelity of its main criterion is veracity. The abstract level of the image is close to zero and it offers a perfect analogy to reality. The representation of the protagonists in the picture works through nonverbal communication which means that communication patterns will be expressed through mimicking and gestures. The reader must interpret the picture through their own cultural knowledge and personal affiliation. In this advertisement, the portrait of the three men aims to represent reality. The purpose here is to depict, in a natural way, three men in a business situation. Because of the background and the nature of the portrait, it is difficult to extract psychological traits of the protagonists.

We can, however, feel their mood which is happy and relaxed because they are smiling at each other. Symbolic attributes are mainly given through the gestures of the three men.

The portrait, as an artistic choice for this advertisement, shows that the Bank prefers to be natural and emphasises the simple aspects of life such as family ties, relationships, and intergenerationality. BNP Paribas's visual strategy is to avoid elaborate advertising using exaggerated elements where the reality might be distorted so as not to offend the Arabic culture (see Section, 2.7).

Analysis of the 'Keep Reaching' campaign



Figure 4.7: Keep Reaching Airport



Figure 4.8: Keep Reaching Capital Club

Background: the 'Keep Reaching' campaign is what we could call a 'glocal' campaign. The advertising campaign consists of a general concept of hanging a picture within a defined background. The Keep Reaching advertisements have all the same artistic style, regardless of the countries in which the bank operates; they only differ in the models and places or backgrounds where they have been taken. It is global in its conception but local through its setting; hence 'glocal' According to a professional communicator at the bank, BNP Paribas launched the new Keep Reaching campaign because the bank has acquired a new status through European and international recognition. It is a worldwide campaign that aims to reassure clients during the economic crisis. The promotional message is saying that 'the bank will back them up in their projects, and encourage them'. It is also a way of suggesting that 'we accompany our clients practically in their daily lives to help them to carry out their projects'. The two visuals will be launched in Bahrain through two media, TV and airport lounges. They were analysed while they were in pre-release and were released in November 2011.

The 'linguistic message'

The linguistic message of both visuals suggests what has just been written previously on the background, and does not have an anchorage function but, adds information to the advertisement. 'Let us accompany you with financial solutions for all your banking and investment needs' emphasising the recurrent theme of 'partnership' and the idea of a human bank close to its people and clients. The use of 'let us' is a personification of the bank. The direct discourse gives clarity to the message and sets a personal tone.

The second linguistic sentence reveals the theme of the advertisement campaign which is Keep Reaching. This linguistic message is more likely to represent the stamp, the title of the advertising campaign, and it becomes a catch phrase or BNP Paribas's sub-brand. The Keep Reaching theme is linked to the earlier analysis of the logo's stars and 'Le Petit Prince' advertisement that already symbolised this very Western idea.

The design in which Keep Reaching appears is interesting. According to the BNP Paribas's brand book, the 'brand flag' (e.g. Keep Reaching logo) in which Keep Reaching is written 'aims to strengthen the sovereignty and recognition of the brand, offering more visibility and increasing the global stance and notoriety of the BNP Paribas's green square'. The fact that the brand flag logo square displays a chipped corner gives a personal touch and accentuates the idea of originality and modernity which breaks with the usual rigid vision of banks' designs. The name 'brand flag logo' reinforces the concept of nationalities. The flag as a brand logo design provides an opportunity for the bank to reaffirm its origin, values and carries a strong metaphoric sense of the bank's cultural identity.

The 'denoted image'

The denoted image or primary, natural subject matter is highlighted in both advertisements' images. In the foreground we can see an actual representation of a portrait of a single man in Figure 4.7 and two men in Figure 4.8. The portrait in both cases hangs on a bar with two tongs like old-fashioned portraits photographs. Each of the pictures is contextualised through a background that defines the place, the time, the space and the nature of the meeting for Figure 4.8. In Figure 4.7 the man

portrayed is young and carries a book or paperwork. He is Bahraini, as he wears traditional dress, and looks like a business man coming back or going on a business trip. The background colour of the photography is brown and reminds one of Russian paper or script paper. The general background of the advertisement gives an indication of place, an airport as we can see an aeroplane in the sky as well as people with luggage.

The second visual represents in its foreground a portrait of two middle-aged business men, one Bahraini as he is dressed in the traditional Bahraini outfit, and a Westerner dressed in a business suit. The two men look quite close within the communication space and the background colour of the photograph is an aged grey. In the background, there are four men, two Bahraini in the middle wearing traditional dresses and to the side two Western men, wearing business suits. The background setting gives information on the location and the men's activity. The scene takes place in a restaurant or a dining room where the four men interact as a group. They are blurred which gives the impression that they are placed within a secondary frame of focus. The same effect is applied to Figure 4.7 as the people walking behind in the background are also blurred. However, in both Figures the location remains clear and well represented. The dominant colour of the first visual presents a light gradation of blue, pink and purple, where, in the second visual, the main colour is a range of ochre, gold, brown.

The 'connoted image'

The secondary or conventional subject matter and the connoted analysis bring to the fore the different symbols that appear in both visuals. Within the two visuals the men portrayed look directly at the camera which brings the reader into the context and provides a more personal approach to the image. The fact that both portraits present men who look directly at the camera brings a symbolic dimension of trust, a very important value within the Arab culture. In Figure 4.7 the young Middle Eastern man carries a book which suggests that we are dealing with an educated person. The book is the symbol of erudition. According to Karolak (2009) Bahrain has the oldest public education system in the Gulf and the literacy rate is one of the highest in the Arab

world. Education is very important within the Arab world and is seen as one of the highest priorities (according to BNP Paribas's studies). The picture of a book within the advertisement can then be seen as deliberate. This image deliberately combines tradition and modernity. This combination directly refers to the idea that the Middle East, and especially Bahrain, is a modern country that respects its own traditions but in harmony with modernity, and that Bahrain has found a balance between tradition and modernity concepts. The book represents tradition and so does the traditional dress worn by the young man in the advertisement. Modernity is displayed through the airport's contemporary architecture shown in the background.

The fact that the communication department has chosen an airport as the setting is important. This advertisement targets CEOs and important clients who generally travel extensively. In choosing an airport as a background the bank plays on the idea that they follow their clients anywhere and that they understand their lifestyle and needs. This advertisement will be displayed at airports to increase the bank's visibility to these very clients. The airport as a location is implicitly associated with a bank that 'accompanies' their clients across borders. The colours used in the background of the picture give a sense of calm. The immobility of the subjects in both portraits stops us in the present.

The pink sky in Figure 4.7 provides a sense of relaxation and also represents an early morning or evening, as we can see the moon in the sky. As it has been previously mentioned early morning and evening are important times for Muslims as it represents the time for prayer. But it may also be associated with the idea of renewal; today is a new day, which brings optimism. The second visual's (Figure 4.8) dominant colour is a graduation of ochre, brown and gold that is a strong reference to wealth and luxury. The scene takes place in a typical classy and luxurious Arabic restaurant reserved for the wealthy. This atmosphere of luxury and elitism reinforces the fact that this is an advertisement campaign for an investment bank. Gulf countries are reputed to be wealthy countries and the advertisement background reinforces this general stereotype circulated by Western media about Gulf countries and their love of gold and other luxurious objects. The picture in the foreground of the advertisement portrays a middle-aged Middle Eastern man and a middle-aged Western man both in formal postures. Their body language suggests that they have a business relationship

but they are also quite close, almost friends. The space between them is reduced which underlines a certain proximity between the two men and reminds us of the theory on Arab communication patterns that stipulates a high level of interdependence. As in this advertisement, in Arab societies, the culture of touch is predominant within communication contexts. The importance of relationship and interaction is again highlighted as a major recurrent theme, and the idea of an alliance between East and West within the bank's business environment is inescapable. Likewise, throughout this analysis of the different visuals, it is crucial to observe that none of the advertising uses a female; it stays very male-oriented throughout the bank's various visual communication media.

The 'intrinsic image'

In addition, the intrinsic meaning or content focus of the cultural context of both visuals presents a defined French artistic style often used by painters and in contemporary photographers. Within both images the men portrayed look to the camera. This photo's technique not only gives a sense of proximity, where the reader is included as a participatory element in the picture, but also provides the artistic style that has been used for this campaign. The artistic concept of having a picture within a picture is called '*mise en abime*' meaning 'placing into infinity' or 'place in abyss. But it is important to focus on the portrait as an artistic style that gives a certain dimension to the advertisement. The portrait style is a technique that highlights a person's facial expression or mood. In general, a portrait displays a person looking directly at the camera. The portrait's background usually gives important details regarding the person being photographed and is usually presented left in soft focus in order to stress the subject of the portrait. In the case of BNP Paribas's advertising, environmental and posed portraits dominate. The environmental portrait aims to show the subject in their usual environment such as the home or workplace. In the case of these two visuals (Figure 4.7 and 4.8), the portrait is presented in a defined environmental metaphor of places commonly visited by the bank's clients. The airport is representative, as the bank's clientele tend to travel for business. The visual showing men in an upmarket restaurant, indicates a place where the bank often receives and entertains its clients.

The portrait is not only an artistic technique used for the Keep Reaching campaign. The *mise en abime* sets the tone, the atmosphere and symbolic dimension of the advertisement, it appears as the major artistic style used for this campaign. The *mise en abime* comprises inserting a tale into another tale; it is the representation of an artwork within an artwork. The background tells us a story and gives information about the subjects (men) and the context. For example, the second visual shows two men (Figure 4.8) in a portrait, a Westerner and a Middle Easterner placed within a background where a business meeting between Westerners and Arabs is taking place. The advertisement's background in Figure 4.8 presents a story of two men from different countries building a relationship. For the airport visual (Figure 4.7) the first story is the educated Middle Eastern man and the inside story, the *mise en abime*, is represented by the background, the airport. The portrait of men in the different visuals seems to be doubled with the representation of both Arabs and Westerners in a meeting or walking in the airport in the background. It is not a pure *mise en abime*, as it is not exactly the same or does not exactly reproduce the image within the image as though a mirror but it is close to the concept of the *mise en abime*. In the case of the Keep Reaching campaign the role of the mirror as the *mise en abime* is taken by the representation of portrait photography, it is then what could be called a modern and subtle *mise en abime*. In addition, it is important to underline the mirror in the second visual as another *mise en abime* of the picture. The *mise en abime* as the main artistic technique for the Keep Reaching campaign gives the impression of clients placed into an infinity, where time goes on, but the portraits remain there as a mirror of the world. The BNP Paribas 'bank of a changing world' slogan creates another dimension with the visuals, the message aims to remind us of the fact that we witness lots of changes around us but clients remain the priority, the bank will accompany them wherever they go, however the world changes. The *mise en abime* then reinforces the concept of presence through the portraits and the background is symbolic of the future through the representation of the protagonist in action.

Overall the 'Keep Reaching' campaign is the product of an advertising campaign that is the junction between the bank's French/European corporate identity (*mise en abime* is a French artistic style) and on adaptation to the local/Islamic market. In theory, this campaign would be defined as a 'glocal campaign'.

Interview content on the adaptation of visuals to the local market

Throughout this analysis the mechanism of a 'glocal' strategy that includes both a global vision with a European touch and a visual adapted to the market's cultural requirements has been highlighted. The question arises, however, whether this was done deliberately or accidentally so interviewees were asked if the bank uses a specific marketing and communication strategy to adapt its identity to suit the Islamic market. Their responses varied. One professional suggested that the bank did not have a specific strategy of adapting its identity to the Islamic market implying thus that the French symbols were sub-consciously inserted. For this interviewee, the bank's identity remained the same regardless of the product and did not really change. Two other communication practitioners felt the strategy taken to adapt the bank's identity to the local market remained global. One proposed that the bank's strategy was based on the concept of being international and does not try to overlay its identity with Islamic symbols. For this practitioner, the bank's identity was well-balanced in the sense that it adhered to the European and international culture of the bank, combining it with a respect for and adaptation to the local market through its advertisements.

The other communication professionals also referred to the concept of a global strategy and suggested that the visuals were aligned with the bank's global strategy. However, one interviewee claimed that the bank was out of its comfort zone in the region and not as well-known as in Europe. As a result, the main focus regarding its identity strategy was on the brand and more specifically, the logo. Logo and brand visibility play an important role in the construction of the bank's identity strategy in the Gulf. The communication professional thought it essential to first create brand awareness in the region but recognised that some work was done to adapt the communication to the local culture. The participant mentioned the Keep Reaching campaign as an example of a global strategy that was adapted to the local market.

This campaign is a global campaign adapted to the local culture so you can see how it was adapted in each market. Here in the region, we just shot this week and we used local places so the airport and the capital club and we use local talent so the people were wearing local things. (RP02)

The main priority here is to communicate on the brand, to make the actual logo very central and, as a result, we don't do designs that dilute the logo. (RP02)

Similar to the above view, another communication practitioner also defined the strategy's key focus of building a strong brand. The interviewee used the example of the Islamic banking brand Najmah, which was created to fit with the Islamic environment and market. He described the process of brand and name creation and name as an important part within the Islamic banking strategy to subscribe fully to the Islamic market demands. The name Najmah is representative of the Bank's strategy to insert itself within the Islamic market. The name Najmah is an Arabic word meaning star, as well as a being a word compatible with the bank's logo and Muslim beliefs. The star symbolises the Islamic culture and Muslim religion. Najmah has been chosen with reference to all these symbols and meaning. The communication strategy was to find a brand that would correlate with the existing corporate identity as well as appealing to Muslims in the region. Moreover, the professional also referred to the use of the Sharia board and stated that communicating the names of the members of the Sharia board was part of the Bank's strategy because the names of the academics that constitute the Sharia board are essential for the bank's credibility.

We worked with group communication in Paris head office to find the appropriate brand name. First a name which sounded nice, secondly a name having a meaning for Muslims and being quoted in the Qu'ran and also being related to the BNP Paribas's logo. Najmah is quite nice when you pronounce it...BNP Paribas Najmah... quite simple. Najmah means star in Arabic so you have several reference in the Qu'ran and it was quite compatible with the BNP logo because we have four stars in the BNP logo. (RP05)

Another communication professional added that the strategy of the Bank to fit into the Islamic market was launched at a product level. To this interviewee, the fact that the Bank created an Islamic branch dedicated to Islamic products for its Muslim clientele was part of the bank's strategy to be more integrated into the Islamic market. Therefore, because it is not a huge part of the Bank's market, the respondent recognises that no real communication strategy has been settled on to communicate on Islamic products except for the creation of the Najmah brand.

Eid and Ramadan card analysis



4.9: Ramadan card



4.10: Eid Card

Background: Eid and Ramadan cards are sent every year during the Ramadan and Eid period to clients from both conventional and Islamic banking as well as for press and media.

The 'linguistic message'

The linguistic messages of the Eid and Ramadan cards are written within the brand flag logo which constitutes the visual identity of the Bank. Therefore within both images, the brand logo is not located in the same place. For the Eid card the brand logo is on the bottom right whereas on the Ramadan card, the brand logo is located on the top right side of the image. These differences might be due to aesthetics. The respective Eid and Ramadan linguistic messages 'BNP Paribas MEA wishes you a blessed Ramadan' and 'BNP Paribas wishes you a blessed Eid' have both the same paradigm construction, they are simple and straightforward. They are classic sentences used as an alternative to the Arabic version – Ramadan Kareem and Eid Mubarak. Mubarak means 'blessed' in Arabic.

It is interesting to note that the Bank chose to send an English version to its clients who are mainly Arabic. This could be explained by the fact that it is a European/French bank and therefore it is more comfortable using English as it reflects the language of business. On the other hand, we notice that the terms 'Ramadan' and 'Eid' are also written in stylish Arabic calligraphy. The artistic style of the Arabic calligraphy of Ramadan and Eid does not just aim to carry a linguistic message but also tends to bring a certain Arabic creativity and aesthetic to the pictures. The linguistic message denotes a religious meaning with the use of the term 'Ramadan' and the verb 'blessed'. These two words put the image into context.

The 'denoted image'

The Eid denoted image depicts a family, a man and a woman with their child, a young girl. The scene takes place in a park where the family celebrates Eid with a picnic. The background shows softly focussed green trees. The family portrayed is typically Middle Eastern. The man wears the traditional Middle Eastern clothing and the woman the

traditional *abaya* with a veil. The young girl has some ethnic Arabic traits and is dressed in Western clothes. The dominant colours of the image are green and white, the BNP Paribas's emblematic colours. The family seems to be happy, they are smiling, and the little girl is playing with her father by putting her hand on his eyes to stop him from seeing and the woman seems to laugh at the scene.

The 'connoted image'

The connoted image or secondary, conventional subject matter suggests that the picture has been taken of a moment in time. It aims to depict family time, strongly associated with Eid. For Muslims Eid is a family celebration as Christmas is for Christians. Children's playing is a strong symbol of Eid. In the Middle East and especially in Bahrain, Eid is marked by children playing on the streets. Once again, the portrait of a happy family for the Eid card highlights the Bank's strategy of focusing on human elements for their advertisements and visuals. Family ties and relationships appear to be BNP Paribas's major theme to fit with the high-context Arab culture. Regarding the background, the picture shows it only in soft focus, where the trees and the general background are blurred showing only shapes and colour.

The dominant colours of the picture are green and white, the Bank's emblematic colours. Thus, the tree and the grass are green which remind one of the green colour of BNP Paribas and the sheet used for the picnic as well as the man's traditional clothes refer to the Bank's linguistic message, typeface and the white stars/birds logo. It is interesting to note a duplication of the Bank's emblematic colours within some elements of the picture, such as the trees, the grass and the green apples that do not fit with Middle Eastern colours. In fact, it is surprising to see the depiction of green trees and grass as it does not reflect the Gulf countries' and Bahrain's environment. Gulf countries are islands mainly constituted of sand and desert. It is rare to see green trees and grass in Bahrain or other Gulf countries as they are very arid. For example, in Bahrain there are no parks and most of the island is constituted of sand and some palm trees. Yet the picture does not portray any palm trees and thus the landscape in the background is not representative of any Middle Eastern country. The environment in which the scene takes place is more likely to be in Western countries such as Europe

or New Zealand, than in the waterless countries of the Arabian Gulf. The colours seem to have been chosen because of their representation of the BNP Paribas's emblematic colours and not as a reflection of reality.

The 'intrinsic meaning'

The intrinsic meaning or content tells us the story of Eid. The cultural context in this visual is presented through the celebration of Eid. *Eid-Al Fitr* is a three day feast that marks the conclusion of Ramadan. It is one of the two major feasts of the Islamic calendar and an important Muslim holiday. *Eid* is an Arabic word meaning 'festivity', while *Fitr* means 'breaking the fast'. It is *haram* to fast on the Day of Eid. It represents a time of religious joyfulness, gift-giving and celebration. It begins as soon as the new moon after Ramadan can be seen (Brown, Navas, Speziani, & Valvo 2008). Common greetings during this holiday are the Arabic greeting '*Eid Mubārak* ('Blessed Eid'). After prayers, Muslims visit their relatives, friends and acquaintances or hold large communal celebrations in homes, community centres or rented halls. Eid symbolises the time when the entire family gathers and celebrates, and when family obligations are priorities. Eid breathes the spirit of community and togetherness. Muslims prepare Eid weeks in advance planning what they are going to wear, what sweets they are going to buy and who they are going to visit. The Eid card sent by the bank to its clients symbolises the spirit of Eid well.

The 'denoted image'

The Ramadan card denoted image portrays a picture of a beach within the foreground with three oil lamps and in the background the shapes of two people, a child and an adult. A soft focus has been used in the background which emphasised the three lamps to the viewer. The dominant colour of the image is a graduation of orange and blue; the overall image is pretty dark. The linguistic Arabic message is written in a stylish calligraphy that takes the form of a crescent moon. The signified and signifier blur as the Ramadan writing melds with the Islamic symbol of the crescent moon. The green

logo of the BNP Paribas is still present as well as the other emblematic colour, white, used in the typography and for the crescent moon calligraphy.

The 'connoted image'

The connoted image or secondary, conventional subject matter is understood through the symbol of the lamps and more precisely the light. The gradation of oranges suggests that the picture has been taken during sunset. Sunset denotes a time of prayer and the beginning of night, which is very important during Ramadan as it symbolises the time when Muslims can break the fast. The colour puts into context the linguistic message of the picture. The light coming from the lamp, a major element in the picture as it is placed in the foreground, denotes life. Among many different religions, light has always had a strong meaning and is still seen as a symbol of faith. Thus, light had an important role in medieval Christianity and for Islam. In Islam light is a symbol of wisdom and knowledge (Behrens-Abouseif, 1999). Many verses of the Qu'ran recount the importance of light and its fundamental role within religion. Thus 'God is the light of heavens and of the earth; his light is like a niche in which there is a lamp; the lamp is like a shining star; it is lit from a blessed tree, an olive-tree, neither an eastern nor a westerner; its oil almost shines alone even if no fire touched it; light upon light. God leads to His light whom He will, and God creates allegories for man, and God knows all things' (24:35). In Islam, light is the symbol of God's revelation; God guides humanity through his light. The light represents the faith and the faculty for men to discern the truth and to free men from darkness (Behrens-Abouseif, 1999). The lamps in the picture are an expression of the Muslims' faith through the time of Ramadan time.

The 'intrinsic meaning'

The intrinsic meaning or content in the picture holds the same role as for the Eid card. The cultural context of the image is defined by the celebration of Ramadan, an important feast for Muslims. Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam and so it is a crucial celebration in Muslim life. Ramadan is a 30 day fast which begins 11 days earlier

each year according to the Gregorian calendar. In other words, the beginning of Ramadan is decided by lunar observations. It is only when the new moon has been officially recognised by the legitimate religious authorities that the month of Ramadan can start. Therefore, if the sky is clouded, the beginning of Ramadan may be postponed which could explain why the BNP Paribas's images (e.g. Le Petit Prince and Ramadan card as well as the television commercial movie) always shows a clear sky with sun or stars as if to portray and bring meaning to Muslim religious practices and beliefs. Muhammad said 'Do not fast until you see the new moon and do not break your fast until you see it, but if the moon is hidden, calculate the time span' (Schirrmacher, 2008, p.2).

The month of Ramadan fast is a reminder of the 'night of destiny' or 'night of power' (surah 97:1). It is also referred to as the 'blessed night'. During the days of Ramadan Muslims are not allowed to eat, drink, smoke, use perfume, injections, or unnecessary medical treatment or have sexual intercourse. The pace of life slows down, special hours in the workplace are organised and schools and shops are closed although shops open at night. Social life and especially visits to family and relatives take place at night when Muslims share a big meal. Ramadan emphasises the communal aspects of the fast, which reveals many of the basic values of the Muslim community. For example, values expressed during Ramadan are: empathy for the poor, charity, worship, steadfastness and patience. Thus, these BNP Paribas Ramadan cards are specifically created during Ramadan and symbolise important aspects of faith during Ramadan such as the crescent moon, the night or sunset, as well as the representation of the light through the lamps standing on the beach as a major symbol of Muslim faith.

Interview content on the potential effacement of the bank's cultural origin

The analysis of the preceding images enter within the idea that during religious time, the national culture and cultural origin of the Bank is suppressed to give rise to a strategy of adaptation in order to fulfil the cultural requirements of the region. As a result the interviewees were asked: Are you aware of any cases where the Bank's French identity is voluntary suppressed (for example during Ramadan)?

The communication professionals disagreed that the French Bank's identity is suppressed or changed. To them, the Bank's identity and origin did not change but adapted itself to the culture, the market and sometimes to religious circumstances.

Three communication practitioners agreed that the Bank's French identity was not voluntarily suppressed but that during Ramadan and Eid it was clear the French identity of the Bank was not prevalent. The Bank's adaptation to the Islamic market was clear and therefore the French identity of the bank was not at the forefront. One interviewee commented:

I wouldn't necessarily say like suppress or change but I think the French bank, the French culture and the French way of working is very, very prevalent, I think when you are here in the Middle East in Bahrain it is different. And I think you can't say you make an exception for something that is religious or a cultural event. (RP02)

The communication professional went further and recognised a good balance between the French identity or origin of the Bank with the culture and religious requirements in the Middle East. The interviewee also mentioned that there was no reason to change or suppress the French Bank's identity as it was inherent to the Bank and that the Bank has acquired a very good reputation over the years.

No, not at all, there is a very good balance. We are very proud of being European [...] people that come to us at CEO levels are aware that we are among the top 10 worldwide and that we are a European bank so it is not something that we suppress but certainly during Ramadan when we send the Ramadan cards I am not going to use a French design. It is just makes no sense so I adapt it. (RP02)

Another interviewee suggested that within Islamic banking it was obvious that the French identity did not prevail because they were operating in the Middle East where Islam and the Arab culture are strong.

I mean of course being in the Middle East we are abiding by the Ramadan rules and also by the Ramadan way of doing things like, first day of Ramadan we send a lot of messages saying, Ramadan Karim or Mubarak so celebrating Ramadan. And we also dedicated a specific card to celebrate the end of Ramadan which is Eid. And so we dedicated specific card that we are Sharia compliant of course, we are careful, that the message is very well perceived by the Muslim colleagues or prospects. (RP05)

One Bank employee did not really see the Bank as a cultural institution with cultural requirements. The interviewee argued that it was not the purpose of the Bank to promote culture. The Bank was an international bank and did not digest culture; it was a bank that provided good quality products without having to emphasise the notion of culture.

We do not show that we are French but more international. We look for a bank that knows how to deliver good products, but we do not try to promote any specific culture through the bank's image that is conveyed. The cultural diversity comes from the internal, the employees. (RP04)

BNP Paribas's CSR calendar picture



Figure 4.11: CSR calendar 2011

Background: In 2011 a calendar was launched under the theme Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Each month is represented by a picture of a CSR event in which BNP Paribas participated or which it created. Every month has a code colour (January pink, February orange etc...). The calendar is distributed every year to the Bank's clients and the media. The picture studied corresponds to the month of March. I chose this picture because it represents well the mix between the French, international and local cultures.

The 'linguistic message'

The linguistic message in this context gives information about the picture and more precisely the CSR event celebrated through the picture. The message is located under the image as a text caption. The text is crucial in the anchorage of information. Without the caption we would not be able to grasp the total meaning of the picture.

The Mix city regional network was launched in BNP Paribas on International Women's Day, 8 March 2010, and brought together more than 50 women from the bank in a forum to network and develops an action plan to improve workplace standards. (Picture's message)

Mix City is an association dedicated to women's empowerment in the workplace. The linguistic message emphasises the notion of 'regional network' which locates the action within geographic boundaries and to a specific date, 8th March 2010 (the International Women's Day). This date is not a random date; it is a symbol of women's empowerment. In France every year on the 8th March we celebrate women's day (*La journée de la femme*). The phrase 'More than 50 women' indicates that it was a successful event. The last phrase 'a forum to network and develop an action plan to improve workplace standards' gives the picture and the context tone in the region. Gulf countries and Africa are reputed to have a low score.

The 'denoted image'

The denoted aspect of the picture presents women from different ethnic backgrounds holding up roses in their hands. Only two men are in the picture. One man stands behind all the women and the other to the extreme right. The women are diversified, all ages and all nationalities; there are many Arabic women veiled and unveiled, an Indian woman at the front, and some Westerners. One of the women holds up a brochure of the Mix City campaign. The code colour of the picture is blue.

The 'connoted image'

The connoted dimension of the picture takes place mainly through the symbol of the rose. Roses are ancient symbols of love and beauty and have often been used as a symbol of the Virgin Mary (Dahlberg, 1969). In this context the rose is more generally a

symbol of women and empowerment, it represents femininity. The rose (*wudu* in Arabic) in Islam has been also a symbol of heaven but is only indirectly quoted in the Surah 55:35 'When the heaven is rent asunder and becomes rosy red, melting like grease'.

The picture also symbolises diversity within the work environment with the portrait of women from different ethnicities. This picture is part of the BNP Paribas's corporate identity strategy to promote diversity in ethnicity and gender within its CSR activities. The angle of the picture emphasises the idea of women's empowerment as they are taken from an upward angle which also accentuates the idea of unity among these women.

The 'intrinsic meaning'

The intrinsic meaning or content focuses on the cultural context of this picture. The cultural context is defined by the issue of sex segregation in Middle East countries. The BNP Paribas's main mission is to fight against inequality between men and women in the workplace. The bank tried to show their concern regarding inequity between men and women in the workplace in France and in Bahrain. In France, a recent study has shown that BNP Paribas was one of the biggest organisations to make real effort to tackle the issue of gender inequity. As a result, they have tried to hire large numbers of women, and women's empowerment seems to be a major theme of the Bank's CSR.

Sex segregation has also become an issue addressed in Bahrain. The government has been aware of inequality between the sexes in the work environment and has tried to improve women's conditions at work. According to Metcalfe (2006 p.93), 'a focus on Bahrain is significant, since it is the world centre for Islamic banking and has embraced an ambitious program of economic and political reform'. As a result, the importance of increasing female labour is essential in order to develop global business and to encourage female talent. Bahrain has seen women's labour participation increase by 668%. Thus,

The numbers of women in political, economic and law professions in Bahrain between 1991 and 2001 have increased by 50%. Bahrain has also seen a sizeable increase in entrepreneurial development and self-employment among women. (Metcalf, 2006, p.96)

Sex roles and relationships between men and women in Muslim societies are mainly defined by Islamic law: the *Sharia*. The *Sharia* determines the ethical dimension within organisations. Organisational practices stress unity (*tawhid*), justice (*adalah*), and trusteeship (*khilafah*). The interpretations of labour laws within Middle Eastern societies are guided by *urf* (custom), which reflects the need to protect women and create a moral work environment. Unfortunately, the number of women working in local companies is still low, as some of *Qu'ran or Sharia* interpretations in the Middle East often require women to stay at home to look after the children.

This picture symbolises the idea of a unity precious to Islamic law as well as Western society's ethics. It seems that the BNP Paribas took as an example a French charity association called '*une rose de Marie-Claire*'. This association uses the rose as a symbol of femininity and empowerment that aims to provide young girls in poor countries with education. The money collected with the purchase of a rose will allow young girls in poor countries access to education. This association exclusively focuses on poor young girls' education needs which are in alignment with BNP Paribas's and Mix City association's aims to empower adult women in the workplace. The symbolic dimension of the rose in the calendar seems to come from a French perspective of seeing the rose as a symbol of women's empowerment that crosses borders.

The 'Najmah' Brochure

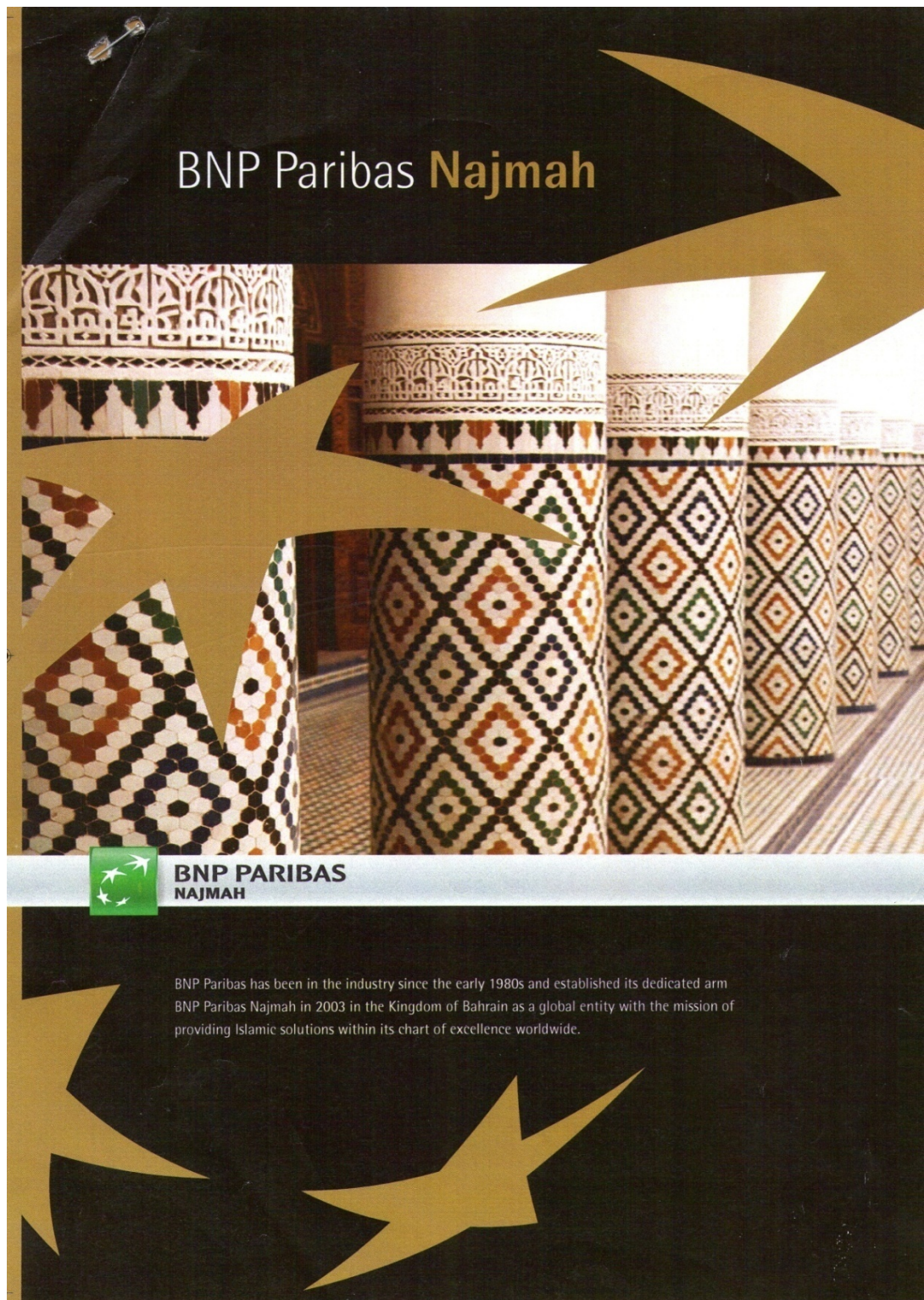


Figure 4.12: Najmah Brochure Inform

The 'linguistic message'

The linguistic message written on the cover of the brochure aims to introduce the BNP Paribas and its Islamic branch. The sentence,

BNP Paribas has been in the industry since the early 1980s and established its dedicated arm BNP Paribas Najmah in 2003 in the Kingdom of Bahrain as a global entity with the mission of providing Islamic solution within its chart of excellence worldwide.

provides a quick history on the bank's implementation in Bahrain (early 1980s) as well as the Islamic Bank's creation in 2003. The text also reasserts the fact that the Bank is international in specifying that it suggests a 'chart of excellence worldwide'. The linguistic message was fairly disappointing as it offered only very general information that does not create interest in the product.

The 'denoted image'

The denoted image reveals three bands to analyse. From top to bottom the image proposes three different main parts each carrying a specific role. The first band presents the brochure title and the name of the Islamic bank, BNP Paribas Najmah on a black background. BNP Paribas is written in white but Najmah is in gold. The second band, in the middle, represents an outdoor place with blue, orange, white and green mosaic colours that cover the columns and the ground. The Bank's star logo crosses the picture to fly away outside the frame. The picture of the columns is also underlined by the BNP Najmah's logo strip located on the bottom half of the page. The third and last band offers the linguistic message on a black background surrounded by the star logo in gold.

The 'connoted image'

The connoted image would be mainly located through what could be perceived as the representation of the outside of a mosque. The mosaic, as the main element of the architecture, has a strong symbolic connotation with Arabic artistic genres and styles. Mosaics are often linked to Middle Eastern countries. The main colours of the cover page are black as a contrasting colour for the BNP Paribas's stars/birds logo in gold

that has been enlarged and is flying out of the frame of the cover page. The logo colour represents the colour of wealth and luxury. It is a sophisticated colour that could be representative of an elitist clientele. Therefore it is interesting to note that the BNP Paribas made the choice to not keep its emblematic colour green despite its strong reference to Islam.

The 'intrinsic meaning'

The intrinsic meaning or content reveals the cultural context of the mosaics' symbolic dimensions portrayed within the picture of the monument or mosque. According to Bloom (1993), Islamic architecture uses mosaic technique to decorate religious buildings and palaces. As a result, mosaics implicitly denote an artistic tool symbolising culture and spirituality. For example, the great Mosque of Damascus and the mosque of the Prophet in Medina both have extensive mosaic decoration. The extensive work and use of mosaics in architecture can be partly explained by the fact that statues and pictures of people and animals are forbidden within mosques, so Muslims mastered columns, mosaics, foliage and other forms of non-representational decoration.

In addition, it is said that the mosaic formations of geometrical shapes such as triangles, lozenges, and circles conceptualise the dimension of unity or the life cycle important within Islam. These mosaic decorations and geometrical patterns create a sense of continuity within the space that is the stamp of the Islamic artistic style (Itewi, 2007; Ghiasvand, Akhtarkavan & Akhtarkavan, 2008).

Overall, the Najmah brochure could explicitly portray strong Islamic symbols but did not seem to do so. Therefore, the brand Najmah can still be seen as a reflection of local and Islamic market needs. One theory of marketing (Nestorovic, 2009) states that to sell purely Islamic products, communication should show one of the five pillars of Islam. Thus the researcher asked the interviewees: One theory of marketing to Islamic audiences is to integrate at least one of the five pillars of Islam as a strategic marketing tool within the communication media. Are you aware of the Bank using this strategy?

None of the communication professionals acknowledged any use of the Islamic pillars in the bank's communication media. None of them had heard about this marketing theory and were unfamiliar with the idea of integrating pillars of Islam within communication.

Some communication practitioners recognised that the bank internally as well as in the case of religious events, respected and integrated what could be defined as one of several pillars of Islam. Thus, interviewees mentioned the bank's efforts to integrate some aspects and practice of Islam such as rooms to pray, and special hours during Ramadan and holidays in harmony with the religious calendar. Interviewees commented:

Not specifically the 5 pillars of Islam, of course we have prayer places for our Muslim colleagues. .. we also .. abide by the rules of the Ramadan ... which is .. fastingand also we have specific working hours. Different working hours'. (RP05)

From a CR perspective, if you want to go down to that region and look at supporting employees in benefits they do offer time off to take a pilgrimage we are all supportive for the Muslims we have here and Islamic people. (RP03)

Another communication professional recognised that even though the bank was creating greeting cards with the representation of some of the pillars of Islam, it was not explicitly linked to a religious strategy.

Also, from the Islamic banking perspective, two communication practitioners acknowledged the presence of the pillars of Islam within the creation of the Islamic products. Therefore, because of the limited communication around Najmah they did not notice any symbols of the five pillars within Najmah's communication. They also stated that it was not a retail bank, so they were not targeting the general public but specific companies and clients which would imply using a different strategy. They commented:

I don't think there is one particular Islamic pillar taken into consideration. Everything is taken into consideration as we by essence create Islamic products. (RP04)

Nothing in the communication media, but we of course abide by all the Islamic finance rules. I mean one of the main is *riba*, no interest. That we communicate, I mean we do not use interest in our products and in our communication; we use for instance profit sharing which is a different meaning. We create specific placement products and asset management products. We don't support companies dealing with alcohol and ammunition, casinos etc. (RP05)

The responses to the question led to the next question, which was: If you are not currently integrating one of the five pillars of Islam in your communication strategy would you do so in the future?

Opinions were divided between participants on this question. Some of the respondents did not have any objection to integrating or using at least one of the five pillars of Islam within their communication strategy. Others were absolutely against it and believed associating religion with business would be a fundamental mistake.

Those against the implementation of Islamic religious symbols within the Bank's communication media claimed that it would be a mistake to implement religious elements into communication media because it would lead to miscommunication and would result in a negative image for the Bank. They commented:

We must not integrate Islamic symbols only for marketing reasons without having a development strategy for business. It may make us not credible if for example we put logos representing people praying everywhere on the BNP Paribas's logos with stars everywhere, the crescent moon etc...(RP04)

If a customer comes in and has an offer during Ramadan for cars discount for example, we do without relating this Ramadan in term of religious thing, you should not relate sale with religion [...] The five pillars are religious we cannot tackle them. Even in Saudi you cannot tackle this. You can never link the five pillars of Islam, the religious stuff to any kind of service or sales it will be an offence. (RP01)

One communication practitioner also stated that it would be a mistake to define the bank in terms of a political or religious entity. Including religious aspects within communication media would make the bank's purpose confusing and the bank would no longer be seen as a secular, non-political, non-religious institution. The interviewee said:

Not for a bank, if I promote Islam yes. Even for the Islamic part of the bank I wouldn't put anything that's religious anything that's political. I would absolutely stay away. Our mission is to look after our clients, and not to try... we can be over clever with marketing and communication but there are certain topics you should avoid. For me religion is absolutely one of them. (RP03)

In opposition to this, two communication professionals were not against using religious symbols in the bank's communication media if it was in harmony with its general identity, brand guidelines and business development. Respondents commented:

Could be. If we have commercial interest to do so we may do it, we communicate on Ramadan already [...] we can have ideas about that to develop our presence in communication and image, the importance of image is key in this activity (here Islamic banking). (RP05)

Why not? I have nothing against it as long as it follows the group guidelines. So it has to be human, it has to be modern and it has to follow the principle of the brand book. (RP02)

Television commercial analysis

Background: This commercial is a global communication tool that has been used to promote the new BNP Paribas's new identity around the world through Television channels. In the Middle East the commercial was released on Al Jazeera in 2011.

In order to be precise it makes sense to first separate and analyse each shot, to then look at the movie as a whole and then to proceed to the connoted and intrinsic meaning of it. It would not be relevant to look at the connoted meanings of each shot separately as they are interrelated in their meaning.

Shot 1: Representation of a young Arabic man, running along the street holding a rope, the camera is moving with him so the image is jittery, giving us the impression that we are running with him.

Shot 2: In continuation of the first shot, we are with the same young Arabic man and the camera has stopped running with him to let him go forward alone along the street still holding the rope. The background of this shot gives us more information on the location of the scene. Thus, we can see that he is in a city, in a Muslim country, as we can see two mosques, one with its dome and its minarets on the right and one other minaret on the left.



(Figure 4.13: Shot 3: Istanbul)

Shot 3: Resonates like a summary, it is a shot of the city at night as the denouement of the two first shots. These three shots happen during sunset. This larger perspective and plan gives us an overview of the city and reaffirms the fact that the action takes place in a Muslim country, that appears to be Istanbul, Turkey. In this shot the representation of diverse mosques strikes the viewer.

Shot 4: Another Asian/Arabic man picks up the rope and waves his arm to seek help.

Shot 5 and 6: Appears to continue on from Shot 4. We see people coming to help the man and gather around the rope in order to hold it.

Shot 7: We focus on a middle-aged Western man. It seems that we have changed location. The Westerner is holding the rope and raises one of his arms as he guides the other who helps him to hold the rope.

Shot 8: provides clues to the location. We are now in Paris; the rope is straightened on the street of Paris. No people are represented. We just witness the rope that gets tightened. The sky gets brighter; it feels like it is the beginning of the day

Shot 9: continuing from Shot 8 as we witness the people that have straightened the rope. The people portrayed in this scene look quite young (young adults) and of mixed gender.

Shot 10: A woman throws a pair of gloves from her balcony; it looks as though we are still in Paris. The gloves thrown from the balcony may mean that they have been given to someone who was pulling the rope or needed gloves to prevent themselves from getting hurt.

Shot 11: We have a view of the people on the street. They keep holding on to the rope and we then focus on a young woman running to help.

Shot 12: Is the continuation, we see more people help to pull the rope while a cyclist is coming from the background towards the camera to enter into the scene which gives more dynamism to the scene.

Shot 13: Similar to shot 8, this shot portrays only the rope alone that is taut between buildings. We are still in Europe.



(Figure 4.14: Shot 14 Asian man)

Shot 14: We switch to another location with a focus on a new protagonist. We have a close-up on an Asian man, holding the rope while standing on a building's roof. We are not in Europe anymore but in a big Asian city.

Shot 15: We have a larger view of the scene. We see the Asian man with other people who help him hold the rope. We now see two big buildings facing us and on each people are pulling on the rope between the buildings.

Shot 16: We are back in Paris; we see the back of a person in the shadows, looking at cityscape of Paris, with the Eiffel Tower in the sunrise.

Shot 17: Provides more detail of the person looking at Paris. We have a close-up of a woman's face (a young French woman) smiling.

Shot 18: still continuing from Shots 16 and 17 where the woman now appears on the roof of a Parisian building, raising her arms saying '*Allez plus fort!*' which is French for 'Come on, stronger!' as we can then understand that she is helping and giving guidance to the people who are pulling on the rope.

Shot 19: Is an extreme close-up shot as it focuses on the hands that are holding onto the rope.

Shot 20: The faces of the people who are holding the rope are revealed.

Shot 21 and 22: We see different faces of the people holding the rope and smiling.

Shot 23: We are in the streets of Europe; people are running between cars parked to come and help the others who are holding the rope.

Shot 24: We have a close-up on a dog who barks at the people holding the rope and an extreme close-up shot of the legs of a man.



(Figure 4.15: Shot 25 African and Western men)

Shot 25: Two men are pulling the rope. One is African, the other is a Westerner, both are young dynamic businessmen, they both wear business clothes and are smiling. This shot is interesting as it highlights the idea of ethnic diversity and ethnic reunification.

Shot 26: Presents an overview of a European landscape during sunset or sunrise. The sky is orange and the landscape reminds us of perhaps Italy showing a chapel or church.



(Figure 4.16: Shot 27 the two children)

Shot 27: Close-up of two children. This is a point of view shot as we see the sun-rise through the children's faces and eyes. The two young boys seem to be from different ethnic backgrounds as one appears to be a Westerner and the other seems to have an Asian/Arabic complexion. The theme of unification between different ethnicities is present here. The children look at the sun rising as we can see that the light on their faces get brighter as the sun rises. As their faces get brighter, they are smiling and their eyes are open wide, symbols of hopes and optimism. The children also symbolise the future; they look at a bright future.

Shot 28: This shot is taken from the inside of an old woman's kitchen. She is seated at a table having her breakfast while looking at the young generation pulling on the rope. She is not an active part of what is happening but is just witnessing it. This could possibly be a negative message which could be that the Bank focuses on the younger generation and not on the older ones. The older woman is put to onside as if she were useless. This appears to me as a very strange shot, a dangerous image of the Bank's portrayal of the older generation.

Shot 29: Extreme close-up of a woman's high heel shoes. High heels suggest here that it is a woman dressed for work.

Shot 30: This shot is a close-up that aims to reveal the woman's face; she is a young adult woman holding the rope with two other young adult women. This is a purely feminine shot were the feminine gender is exclusively represented as an active part within the action of pulling on the rope.

Shot 31: An overview of dynamic young people, men and women, happily pulling at the rope.

Shot 32: Focuses solely on the rope being pulled tight against the sky while the sun is passing between trees. The camera looks at the sky, representing the future with the sun as an optimistic elemental symbol of a bright future.

Shot 33: Overhead shot of Rome in the sunrise or sunset.

Shot 34: An overview of a city from the inside of a building, with a high angle shot, where the camera is positioned above the subjects, it is also an extreme long shot as the camera is far away from the action and we cannot clearly see the people. The people are on the street during the sunset or sunrise. This shot follow on to the next shot. Here we quickly see two ropes coming from the direction of the sun with people holding on to it.



(Figure 4.17: Shot 35 groups of people with ropes)

Shot 35: This shot confirms the preceding shot in portraying two groups of people, each holding a rope. They are represented in parallel within the city previously portrayed. Between the two ropes, a young girl is running with her school bag. The people portrayed are from all nationalities, thus we can notice an Asian man among Westerners. This scene could symbolise two worlds in parallel unified in the same action of pulling on the ropes.

Shot 36: Representation of an Asian man pulling the rope.

Shot 37: A close-up of the smiling Asian man carrying his child, a young girl, on his shoulders. On his side people keep pulling on the rope while the young girl on her dad's shoulders claps her hands as a sign of encouragement.

Shot 38: The action is still taking place on the street from an overhead extreme long shot as we cannot clearly see the people seeing them only as a group and the tops of their heads.

Shot 39: A shot of a city. The camera is positioned at an angle that shows a street between buildings with a sunset or sunrise and the taut rope on the street.

Shot 40: An extreme long shot that gives us an overview of another big city (maybe in America) again during a sunset or sunrise and again with the representation of several ropes that seem to come from the top of different buildings leading to the sun.

Shot 41: Close-up of a woman's profile looking directly at the sky with her hands on shielding her eyes from the sun.



(Figure 4.18: Shot 42 The three women)

Shot 42: Close-up of three women happy, smiling and clapping their hands. The three women represent diversity due to their different ethnic backgrounds. Two seem to be Africans and another seems to be Asian.

Shot 43: The final shot is an extreme close-up of the back of a man walking with on his the slogan 'Keep Reaching' on his back.

The linguistic message of this TV commercial (see index) arrives at the end and says:

Everyday holds promises and challenges to be met. At the BNP Paribas Group we understand it takes everyone to move the world forward. So let's keep trying, let's keep dreaming, let's keep reaching.

This linguistic message is in harmony with the different shots presented in this commercial. It aims to deliver a positive and optimistic message and reasserts the Bank's values and ambitions. It sounds like a motivational message of hope. This message appears in opposition to what we could expect from a bank as it is not formal but instead plays on the register of the metaphor with 'it takes everyone to move forward.[...] Let's keep dreaming'. It carries a kind of poetic dimension, with an idea of a dream reaching upward.

The overall intrinsic meaning and connoted image of the advertisement is highlighted through a symbolic representation of the rope as a metaphor of hope and tool of solidarity and unity as well as the symbolic meanings of the sun and the sky as omnipresent elements within the TV commercial. The TV commercial is a global promotion by the Bank, and aims to deliver a positive and reassuring message towards its clients. The rhythm is fast, as it constitutes 43 shots in 57 seconds. The rapid speed of the shots aims to provide dynamism to the advertisement and energises the scenes. The 57 seconds of the commercial provide us with what we would call an associative sequence as the scenes and shots are linked together by one object, the rope or the sun.

The recurrent symbols of the sun, the sky and the rope among the shots build the sequences and the links shots. They appear as the main thread that constitutes the TV commercial. The rope in the different shots is mainly represented as coming from the top of some building or from streets heading towards the sun. We can also interpret the action through the idea that the people who are holding the rope intend to bring the sun to them which would explain, in a metaphoric way, the Bank's advertisement and identifying concept of 'keep reaching'. The sun has a powerful meaning as it sleeps or awakens the city and is a direct symbol of hope that in this context comes with the idea of aspiration. The rope symbolically carries the metaphor of solidarity and social unity as people from all ethnicities gather around the same rope to access the same dream. Moreover, the people in the advertisement are in the forefront of the BNP Paribas's communication strategy. It is therefore interesting to notice that the people portrayed are mainly young business workers and children, being an expression of the future. The depiction of people is also linked with the idea of social unity, where ethnic and cultural differences are removed. The purpose here is to portray a unified world, where people have the same aspiration and where culture does not actually play any specific role. The TV commercial does not represent any specific culture apart from the company's idea of a cultural unification. It is important to remember that the idea of 'keep reaching', the stars or the sun, as it has often been symbolised in the various bank communication media, is a very Western idea. Likewise, the advertisement is more representative of a European idea of cultural unification and tends to represent European countries more than Eastern or Asian countries. There are more shots that have been filmed in the European landscape than in a Middle Eastern or Asian environment. The European idea of the Bank takes over other potential cultural identities.

Miscommunication issues interview

Through the analysis of the BNP Paribas's communication media and the interaction of both French/European and Middle Eastern cultures, the question of potential miscommunications has been raised during interviews in regard to the different advertising campaigns and other visuals used by the bank over recent years. Thus, the

question was asked: Are you aware of any miscommunications that could occur between the bank and its Islamic market as a result of the content?

Three communication professionals were unaware of any miscommunication. Two said that from the Najmah perspective, everything was so regulated and in harmony with Islamic law that the risk of miscommunication through of visuals or products was very limited. One commented:

No, I am not aware of any miscommunication of that type. Our Najmah is made up of many Arabic speaking people so I don't see; I don't think in the language we have problems.... In terms of image pictures... and also each time we promote it has been reviewed by our Sharia board, so this gives us proof that it is Sharia compliant. (RP05)

In contrast, two communication practitioners mentioned potential miscommunication issues due to images and messages that almost occurred in the region. One reported that the bank had issues in Saudi Arabia with the CSR calendar, constituted of many CSR images of the Bank's employees during philanthropic and other CSR events. The problem was that they contained pictures considered inappropriate in Saudi Arabia. Two pictures were of particular concern: one was showing a woman's legs, and, in another, a woman's cleavage could be seen. The calendar was sent back to the communication department in Bahrain who were able to avoid a miscommunication issue, as the calendar had been stopped in time and had not been sent to clients. The interviewee said:

Normally I follow these things for everything but this one I missed, I think because it was so small. And I didn't know it was going to clients but even though the picture was so small I didn't think it would have a negative impact so they stopped it thank God, it didn't go to clients!! (RP02)

Also, both communication professionals mentioned a tagline issue with the Keep Reaching campaign. The original tagline of this campaign – 'the founders of change are people like you' provoked many issues in the Middle East. For example, in Turkey, the tagline had legal issues and in Egypt, during the Arab Spring, the tagline was put on hold as it could be associated with the revolution and, when the regime changed, was released. Bahrain was different, because Bahrain was still in a tense situation with a lot

of unrest, and the bank decided to launch the Keep Reaching campaign without the tagline. The Bank in Bahrain did not want to be associated with the Arab Spring movement or with the revolution or with any political position. Communication practitioners commented:

Here in the region and what is happening in Bahrain it would have been perceived as seeking a position that we are telling the locals you are the founders of change so change the regime. So that is why we are going to put it as it is without the founders of changes message so it is not exactly adapting to the Islamic market but to market circumstances. (RP02)

The strap line we are using 'the founders of changes are people like you' is not appropriate because in Bahrain if we go out and start saying to the people 'the founders of change are people like you' you can go ahead, you can make changes, you can succeed it all depends on you, then, we can potentially be perceived as supporting the revolution, so we had to change it. (RP03)

4.4 Summary

The case study, especially the analysis of images in relation to the interviews, has shown that the question of culture was quite a complex issue. The idea of cultural interaction within the Bank's communication media showed complexities where the cultural origin of the bank sometimes contrasted with the local culture. Overall we saw the desire of BNP Paribas to promote unity within culture which seemed to be in contradiction with the essence of culture. In promoting social unity through a uniform culture, the corporate took the risk of wiping out cultural specificities and so the risk of miscommunication or offending was higher. The idea of a communication that wants to be innovative or to break with the traditional cannot be in harmony with the concept of a global culture overused by corporations to promote social unity. BNP Paribas does not have a strategy to promote any specific cultures or even to use the concept of culture in its communication media. It does have to be culturally adaptable but it does not seem to be a priority. It is aware of cultural differences and adaptations but does not base communication on such concepts. It has the desire to be recognised as a European and international bank and promotes a global culture and tends to see the world without borders as a single and uniform place.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an interpretation of the case study results. The purpose is to discuss and understand the cultural interactions within the Bank's communication media as well as their impact on corporate identity. The discussion will give an insight into the Bank's strategy in regards to its position towards cultural elements and difficulties in its desire to achieve cultural homogenisation without having to fall into the trap of global culture. The complexity and sometimes duality of cross-cultural communication and its influence on communication media will be highlighted with the need for the industry to adapt to the cultural environment and the local market. The chapter will also respond to the suggested question introduced in the first chapter of the thesis. The debate around the findings will be concluded by a summary of the key results and potential limitations of and suggestion for the research.

5.2 An ambivalent identity

A French bank; a French vision

BNP Paribas is first and foremost a French bank in national identity and origin. The consonance and name BNP Paribas is French for *Bank Nationale de Paris*. Because the national identity of the bank is French one would have expected to find a set of French cultural elements or to be able to identify French roots in the Bank's communication media. Through the analysis of the different communication media and the logo, potentially French symbols are often associated with other cultural elements resulting in the bank's adaptation to one culture, ambition and expansion into the world which dilutes the bank's national identity. On one hand, the French touch defined hereafter by the adjective *frenchness*, is evident through elements, such as symbols, the title of advertisement, or the visual artistic style. For instance, several French references or symbols appear in many visual communications; these French cultural elements will be developed later on in the discussion in association with other cultural symbols not part of the French culture.

One advertisement particularly attracted attention, as its title is derived from a famous French novel in a deployment of the Bank's national identity and origin. This advertisement called 'Le Petit Prince' (see Figure 4.5) carries a strong implicitly French poetic dimension, though not perceived by clients or audiences as such. The title is a nod to this fairy-tale written through allegories of interactions between human beings and adventures as parts of the discovery of life. It is then interesting that the original idea of the advertisement coming from a French perspective and source of imagination was voluntarily removed (the title does not appear) as it would not have a meaning for the local population. Every French citizen knows this novel which is not the case for Bahraini citizens who may not be familiar with French literature and so using its title for an advertisement shows the attachment of the bank to its national French identity as a source of creation. In fact, 'Le Petit Prince' is an adapted advertisement as it has been created solely for the Middle East region and the title has been deliberately removed from the campaign.

Another example of BNP Paribas's *frenchness* would also be the CSR calendar with a possible French interpretation of the rose symbol. First of all, the rose has a strong Catholic religious reference as it was linked to the Virgin Mary. However, the rose has no religious reference in Islam because the rose is not explicitly mentioned and does not seem to be representative of any important religious figure or idea. Yet in France the rose has a strong connotation in regards to the symbolic representation of women's empowerment. In the calendar, the picture representing local women working for the Bank in Bahrain, placing a rose as a symbol of empowerment and gender equality in the workplace is more representative of a theme important in France rather than in Bahrain even though Bahrain tends to be increasingly sensitive about sex segregation and gender inequality in the workplace.

From the interviewees' perspectives, all participants recognised the French identity as the original national identity of the organisation. However, it is important to acknowledge that interviewees came from different ethnic backgrounds, nationalities and religion and this, consequently, had an impact on their answers in regards to the *frenchness* of BNP Paribas's corporate identity. They found the Bank's French identity not very obvious in BNP Paribas's brand and visual communications which reflects

what was suggested earlier, that the Bank is French in its vision without explicitly promoting a French identity. One participant describes the bank as clearly French because of its internal hierarchical structure which reflects the stereotype of French culture where internal management structures tend to be mainly constituted of white males. The interviewee went further and noticed that the BNP Paribas in Bahrain and even the BNP Paribas Islamic banking carried a strong French influence in terms of work vision. According to him, within Islamic banking there are no real visual communications or communications representing explicit religious symbols that could be inherent to Islamic banking communication. The lack of visual religious representations can be explained by the fact that the French have difficulties in associating business with religion. In fact, in France, the concept of secularisation is very strong and embedded in French cultural identity and cultural working practices. Moreover, the Bank also seems to have a French vision of the Arab culture, but we will develop this point later on the discussion (see Section 5.3).

Regarding the logo, participants did not see any French cultural elements in it. They tended to describe the bank as European with international ambitions even though they are aware that the Bank's first identity (national) is French.

A bank associated with the 'European culture'

Most of the interviewees described the bank as more European than French when asked to define the Bank's general corporate identity. It was evident that they had difficulty in clearly defining the cultural identity of the bank. In terms of origin and national identity and internal structure, some recognised the French vision of the bank but in terms of a mission they defined it as European, which underlined certain ambiguities towards the bank's cultural position. According to interviewees, the BNP Paribas displayed a European mission and ambition through its latest European acquisitions. Moreover, it seems to be the bank's desire and strategy to be recognised as European as opposed to French. The idea of understanding French culture through the European confirmed the ideas described in the literature review that consist in including and understanding the French culture through the European concept (see Section 2.4) . The strategy is to enhance BNP Paribas's identity in a larger culture that gives the opportunity for the organisation to extend its identity and to increase its

legitimacy in the market. As a result, participants understand the corporate identity in terms of the organisation's propagation and mission on a European scale more than in terms of a specific culture. Ambivalence in the description of the Bank's cultural identity can be highlighted as interviewees recognised and defined the Bank's corporate identity through diverse identities which in theory is not surprising and remind one of Balmer's theory on corporate multiple identities (see Section 2.5). In terms of corporate cultural specificities, participants showed difficulties in associating the Bank with a specific culture even though they recognise the Bank as French by its national identity, but within the ideas of a European culture.

From the logo perspective, many interpretations are possible. It can be assumed that the logo displayed some elements suggestive of Europe through the green square symbolising a flag and the stars inside representing the European stars (see Figure 4.1). BNP Paribas's logo could easily be interpreted as the symbolic representation of the European flag as according to magazine 'stratégie.fr'. Overall, interviewees showed some difficulty in relating BNP Paribas's corporate identity to a specific culture which brings us to the concept of a universal and global cultural identity, where the Bank's cultural corporate identity can be interpreted by everyone.

An ambiguous identity

The ambiguous and varied responses from participants to define BNP Paribas's corporate identity and the multiple identities (French, European and international) that the logo can suggest, causes the bank's cultural identity to become ambivalent. This ambivalence of whether it is French, or a European bank with international ambitions and so not related to a specific culture creates the sensation that, the BNP Paribas's corporate identity tends to be universal as it can be interpreted by various cultures. In this context, it moves closer to the concept of a global culture. Communication professionals did not explicitly relate the logo to a specific culture but more to a logo that portrayed the bank's international ambition. As a result, the logo and other visual communication media are more likely to be representative of universal and global concepts of corporate identity.

One participant even described the bank as being derived from a European culture but defined the corporation through the term 'global bank'. The logo carries a universal meaning as it depicts universal symbols and characteristics, such as the stars and the colours that have positive meanings in various cultures and are recognisable by all of us. As Floch (2001) mentioned, stars are universal symbols and often have strong symbolic dimensions in many different cultures. In the Muslim/Arab culture and religion, the stars retain an important role as they are guides for the Berber in the desert; in the Catholic religion they are related to the star of the shepherd and, in the Muslim religion, the star with the crescent moon is the symbol of Islam. Using the star and a flying bird which is often associated with the idea of openness and freedom as a logotype shows the desire of the Bank to be recognisable in many different countries and cultures and to play on a global strategy that includes the concept of universality. Moreover, the shape of the bird in the logo could possibly be interpreted as a dove (as one interviewee did) which would then also have a strong connection with the Christian religion. The dove can be interpreted as a Christian symbol that reminds us of Noah's Ark, peace and the Holy Spirit. As a result, BNP Paribas carries a quite universal and global concept of culture within its main corporate identity, its logo. We will see later on in the discussion how the concept of global culture will be verified through other visual communication media and in the concept of local adaptation.

5.3 The French culture embedded within the local culture

An adapted communication media with local themes

As it has been recognised earlier, BNP Paribas has a seemingly French vision of its communication media and operations. However, an effort to deliver adapted communication media in the region can be noticed. The bank tends to adapt its visual communication media in response to local cultural specificities and needs. An adaptation of a communication medium requires it to

consider differences among countries, including – but not limited to – culture, stage of economic and industrial development, stage of product life cycle, media availability, and legal restrictions (Agrawal, 1995, p.26).

BNP Paribas's communication media in Bahrain have been specially conceived for the Middle East region and have taken a local approach through the appropriation of different Arabic themes and symbols. In the analysis, it became obvious that there were different degrees in the local adaptation of some communication media. For instance, 'Le Petit Prince,' the CSR calendar and the wealth management campaign are as local as the Najmah brand or the Eid and Ramadan cards. The CSR calendar, Le Petit Prince and the wealth management advertisement campaigns present similarities in the way they displayed the local Arabic culture. They essentially focused on Middle Eastern cultural aspects and not on religious ones in contrast to the Najmah brand with the Eid or Ramadan cards being exceptions in their treatment of culture. The different visual communications of 'Le Petit Prince', the wealth management campaign and the CSR calendar display common local themes important to the Arab culture. In general the main theme within the Bank's communication media is a very human-oriented theme. All visual communications portray a human figure or people interacting with each other. The different linguistic messages that accompany the advertisement campaigns often take a personal tone and use personifications like 'accompany' or 'partner' to bring a more human side to the Bank. This communication strategy fits with the Arabic culture associated with the high-context culture often defined through in-group collectivism and interdependence, close to the bank's vision of human interaction in its communication media. Likewise, as it has been mentioned several times in the literature review (see Section 2.7), the Arab culture is defined as relationship-oriented where communication mainly comes through human relationships or interaction.

A redundant visual cultural element can also be observed within the different BNP Paribas's communication media. The representations of Arabic men wearing the traditional local dress are portrayed in all the BNP Paribas's advertisement campaigns released in the Middle East. In regards to the bank's strategy, the visual cultural adaptation in Bahrain mostly takes place through the representation of Arab men in traditional Bahraini clothes. All advertisement campaigns (see Figures 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.10) display Arab men wearing the thobe and the white dress also worn on Friday for prayer day. But is this a sufficient cultural element to reflect the concept of local adaptation? Is it not a simplistic view of the Bahraini culture in terms of images?

Showing Arab men in local clothes is quite an easy way to represent the local culture without really tackling the concept of cultural specificities that would be more able to transmit the cultural essence of the country. Local dress is not just associated with Bahrain but with the entire Arab Gulf. It is also important to notice that the bank's advertisements are male oriented as it would require more specificities and complexities to portray women within the Islamic culture. The bank chooses to take shortcuts that aim to avoid possible miscommunications or cultural and religious issues. This standardised adaptation allows the Bank to facilitate communication across the Arab Gulf.

Other important themes that could be associated with the local culture can be outlined. For example the themes of both generation and family appear in 'Le Petit Prince', the wealth management campaign and Eid card. As mentioned in the literature review, Arabs have a high sense of affiliation; of loyalty towards family and respect for the elderly (see Section 2.7). All these cultural features are expressed in the campaign's linguistic messages. Thus, 'Le Petit Prince' suggests an affiliation between the man and the young boy as they appear quite close emotionally and physically and so both themes of generation and family are apparent. Also, Eid and the wealth advertisement campaign display the theme of generation and family ties dear to the Bahraini culture. The generational theme is mainly displayed through the representation of the young Arab in Western clothes in the wealth management campaign (see Figure 4.6) and children in the two other visuals. In the wealth management advert the young adult Arab figure is contrasted with the middle-aged Arab man in traditional dress that could be easily interpreted as his father (see Figure 4.6). The Eid card (Figure 4.10) displays a typical Arab family breaking the fast. The different pictures symbolise the different generations and generational differences in the Bahrain of today. Also, in displaying both generations and choosing to represent the modern part of the country symbolised through the young Arab in Western clothes and the more traditional part of Bahrain symbolised by the older Arab in traditional dress, implicitly tackles the actual topic of a Bahraini cultural identity in crisis torn between a Western style of life and traditional aspirations (see Section 2.4). Overall, the fact that BNP Paribas made an effort towards cultural adaptation through some of its communication media leads us to the conclusion that the local culture partly

influences the Bank's corporate identity, vision and strategy. However, the local adaptation of the bank is restricted to limited cultural aspects of the Bahraini and Middle Eastern culture and is not explicitly linked to the Islamic religion. Where we would have expected a kind of symbiosis of both Arab cultural features and the Islamic religion, as Islam rules the country, the Bank preferred to avoid any explicit religious symbols that could have given a deeper dimension to the concept of Bahraini and Middle Eastern local adaptation. Moreover, it seems that the impact of the local culture is not complete and often biased by the French/European vision and national identity inherent to the bank's corporate identity which brings us to the question of a potential duality between the French/European culture and the local culture.

Cultural duality

Even though for some of its visuals BNP Paribas chose to adopt an adapted strategy, and interviewees did not explicitly recognise it, the French culture of the bank remains strong. Sometimes subconsciously, the bank applied a Westernised vision of Bahraini and more generally Arab culture which may provoke difficulties for the population to identify with them or even to understand the different symbols and messages of the corporate communication media. As mentioned earlier in the discussion (see Section 5.2), some French cultural features seem to be quite intrinsic to the bank's corporate identity despite the effort of local adaptation. 'Le petit prince' is a good example as it is representative of the cultural duality between France and the Middle East; it mixed cultural symbols from both its French point of view and vision with the local representation of Bahrain. Thus, the different cultural concepts displayed in the advertisement may possibly lead to different interpretations.

Other French cultural thoughts and concepts have been seemingly placed in the advertisement and are in contradiction with local thinking. For example, the picture (Figure 4.5) shows a young boy pointing at the stars as if a direct reference to his destiny and future and the linguistic message reinforces the idea that this child has control over his future if he chooses BNP Paribas as a partner. The idea of future mixed with the idea of looking at the stars as a symbolic representation of 'reaching the stars' is a very Western idea and concept of destiny and the future. The future as a key

concept within the bank message is understood from a Western perspective. In fact, in the Western world, people tend to project themselves into the long-term future whereas Eastern and especially Arab societies have difficulty in projecting themselves in the same way and tend to conceptualise the future as an uncontrollable element only decided by God. For instance, when a Westerner communicates in the future tense to an Arab, the Arab will systematically answer with the word 'in'shalla' which can be translated as 'if God wants' or 'God willing'. The notion and dimension of time orientation within the advertisement does not seem appropriate within Arab cultural beliefs. Another misinterpretation is possible in regards to the Western symbolic conception of 'reaching the stars' shown by the figure and gesture of the little boy in reference to the linguistic message.

The CSR calendar is also a good example of cultural duality, where the French culture seems to be inherent within the display of local people and the nature of the event symbolised by the rose. The rose as a symbol of women's empowerment is more likely to come from a French interpretation and symbolisation of gender inequality issues in the workplace, especially as the rose is a strong symbol in France and the Catholic religion and not so much in the Arabic one. This symbol won't offend, but its meaning will be lost. Cultural symbols are accepted as long as they do not risk offending a culture.

A religious adaptation

Eid, Ramadan cards and the Najmah brand are the only communication media that have been adequately adapted to the Islamic market. The Najmah brand has been especially created to fit with the Islamic environments and needs. It fully subscribes to the Islamic market. Najmah is an example of a total adaptation of the bank to the Islamic market where the Islamic symbolic representation of the brand takes over the French/European corporate identity. However, the logo remains the same and its universal meaning has been oriented around an Islamic connotation. In fact, Najmah does not just have an Arabic consonance but also means star and respects the bank's original corporate identity. Najmah could be representative of both cultures (French

and Arabic) as it has meanings in both cultures and the colour green in both cultures represents nature and life.

Moreover, the Najmah brand is mainly communicated through a brochure, interviews and conferences on Islamic banking. It is interesting to note that the Islamic bank does not so much communicate in terms of visuals but through the idea of a communication based on human interactions through the organisation of events. Because its communication mainly comes from the idea of relationship building and interaction between particular professionals or clienteles, from the researcher's personal observation and knowledge of the culture and region, the bank strategy is reminiscent of the very Arabic concept of *wasta* that consists in developing communication through relations and connections. The *wasta* is reflective of Arabic cultural roots, as it represents an important cultural notion that includes a certain concept of communication based on relationship connections. Najmah communication is then in harmony with the cultural concept of *wasta* and confirms the theory that Arabic communication is mainly constructed through relationships. In Islam, business activity is considered to be a socially useful function which makes Najmah and other BNP Paribas's communication strategies adequate and appropriate to Bahraini culture. The only Najmah visual is a brochure which consists of introducing the Islamic bank's different services and to communicate on the *Sharia* board. As a result the Najmah brand is what Fill (2005) called a 'brand religion' a brand especially created in harmony with Muslim beliefs and is certified *halal*. Najmah communicates only on the core values of Islamic products and so is successful in communication.

Other visuals such as the Eid and Ramadan cards have been used for both conventional and Islamic banking and are the product of religious greetings. They both involve strong religious symbols and meanings. The linguistic message is written in Arabic calligraphy and uses the religious word 'blessed' that clearly state the religious context (see Figures 4.9 and 4.10). Both cards represent typical values that are shared during the religious celebration of Ramadan with the representation of the end of a day and Eid with the depiction of a typical Arab family which reminds us of the importance of family gathering during Eid. Ramadan carries strong symbols of Islamic faith through the image of three lamps. In the Muslim religion lights are the symbolic representation of God and faith that will guide you in the dark. Thus, it is interesting through the

analysis of these various adapted communication media to see that despite their reluctance to communicate through religious symbols, the bank still needs to some extent to include religious signs within its communication in order to be credible and well perceived by the audience.

5.4 BNP Paribas and the 'glocal' strategy: the case of 'Keep Reaching'

The glocal strategy, a fine balance?

Glocalisation can be translated by the following slogan 'think global act local'. The globalisation effect takes place within a dialectic between the global and the local.

The glocalisation is 'the process whereby global corporates tailor products and marketing to particular local circumstances to meet variation in consumer. (Maynard & Yan, 2004, p.288)

Multinationals using 'glocalisation' within their communication media reflects the aspiration of promoting a global approach while recognising the importance of adapting to a local market and culture. The glocalisation strategy is the result of the desire to find a fine balance and harmony between standardisation and adaptation (Svensson, 2001). In the case of BNP Paribas, the Bank's communication strategy has been using the 'glocalisation' strategy in its most recent advertising campaign, 'Keep Reaching', in order to find a balance between their global international ambition and their awareness of cultural differences that cannot be ignored. Interviewees recognised a good balance between the French identity as the national identity of the Bank, with the culture and religious requirements in the Middle East. With the exception of the Keep Reaching Television commercial that is standardised and representative of a global approach, the advertising campaigns on billboards provided a glocal approach where the general European guidelines have been followed and local touches have been added to the campaign. One interviewee defined the campaign as a 'global campaign adapted to the local culture' (see interview RP02, p.103).

The Keep Reaching campaign in the Middle East follows precisely this idea of glocal where the defining line between modernity and tradition has been erased. The

advertisement billboards have mixed both tradition and modernity as it is supposed to represent the Middle East countries at a turning point between modernity and tradition as if they are mutually exclusive. Instead of looking at the Gulf countries tugging between modernity and tradition and the negative impacts it have on the national identity and the political context, the bank's communication uses it as an asset. Thus, it supports what Robertson (1995) claim that glocal traditions are needed because diversity sells. But is the glocal really representative of cultural diversity? The glocalisation strategy can be seen as a way of simplifying and erasing cultural diversity and cultural specificities into a hybrid global culture where all cultural differences are projected into one big culture. In regards to the bank's glocal communication campaign, they do not move too far into the 'glocal' as they only replace the French/European model with traditional Arab men. No Arabic language is used and the picture focuses on the two worlds, French European and Middle Eastern of which neither seems truly representative of the Bahraini population. They could also portray other local traditions and cultural features (other than dress alone) that could be more relevant to the cultural specificities of the Middle East or Bahrain. For instance, a picture set in typically traditional or cultural places in Bahraini history would have been more significant for the glocal strategy instead of portraying modern places that could be seen in any country.

The Keep Reaching advertisement campaign tends to emphasise the modernity of the Middle East which could be perceived negatively by clients. Arabs often understand modernity through the concepts of secularisation or globalisation and link it to European countries. The glocal strategy adopted by the bank reflects the desire to portray simultaneously varied cultural symbols to create an 'ensemble' of cultural codes recognisable by both cultures, the French European and the Middle Eastern. This cultural code results from a process of cultural simplification where cultural features and specificities are blotted out to create a sort of a utopian global culture created by a bricolage of cultures.

The global, the bricolage and the risk of generating patterns

The glocal strategy which consists in providing different cultural codes to create a global vision of culture risks generating cultural patterns and stereotypes. The glocal often uses cultural bricolage to transmit and inscribe their corporate identity into a global vision. The cultural bricolage was first introduced by Levis-Strauss. According to Theunissen, Mersham, and Rahman (2010), the concept of bricolage comes from the creation of a 'cultural myth' that consists in rearranging and juxtaposing different cultural symbols. The Keep Reaching campaign uses this bricolage process as they adjust, juxtapose and assemble symbols of the French and Middle Eastern cultures. Thus, they replace a white male stereotype of the French European culture with the stereotype of an Arab in Middle Eastern traditional dress who also culturally symbolises the Middle East. One stereotype is superimposed by another one.

The artistic style of the shot has also been inspired by the very French artistic style, *la mise en abime*. One interview participant underlines the importance for the Bank to keep communicating in a French way as the unrest in Bahrain has provoked locals' suspicions about local bank's abilities. Thus, it is relevant for BNP Paribas to state and portray their *frenchness* in harmony with local adaptation, to be seen as different from local banks that are no longer trusted by the population. The bank has reorganised typical cultural symbols to develop a new code of meaning that will lead to a global sense of culture. This creation of a 'cultural myth' through the concept of bricolage is often the result of the corporation's economic desire to make profits.

BNP Paribas wants to create a visual corporate identity based on this cultural bricolage that aims to portray unity and similarities for economical purposes mainly driven by the utopia of portraying social unity and harmony among cultures and especially between the French/European and the Arabic Bahraini. In appropriating these cultures by creating an ensemble of culture to generate a new culture unique to BNP Paribas, the bank has created a subjective culture. This subjective culture results from a bricolage and glocal strategy that is in essence paradoxical, with the idea of creating its 'own cultural identity'. Thus, BNP Paribas's idea of promoting its 'own cultural identity' using cultural bricolage and glocal strategy encourages the formation of a global

identity. This global identity is not representative of the essence of culture and shows limitations in providing a vision of cultural specificities.

BNP Paribas proposes a post-modern experience in promoting a notion of alliance between West and East; France and Europe with the Middle East and Bahrain. This post-modern experience aims to highlight similarities between both cultures through an advertisement campaign that extracts a feeling of human and cultural harmony. The Keep Reaching campaign, for example, portrays a global identity encompassed in the concept of regional identity for the sake of social unity among cultures and among France and Bahrain. By creating a global identity through bricolage and glocal strategy, the bank inevitably sweetens cultures. The cultural meaning of both French European and Arabic/Bahraini becomes loose and stereotypical. In addition, from the interviewees' point of view, the cultural aspects of the bank's corporate identity were not prevalent. The local Arabic and Islamic culture especially were not represented and the French origin was not obvious either. They did not link BNP Paribas's corporate identity with any specific culture but with many different cultural aspects that did not appear to be meaningful or strong. Such different cultural layers have created a global identity where cultural features may have different interpretations in regards to the audience's cultural sensitivity and where culture is not in the bank's strategic front line. The global identity results also from the bank's lack of commitment to communicate the Arab culture in terms of religion. Religion gives depth to a culture because it determines beliefs and values and, because the French prefer secularisation, the bank shows difficulty in expressing the depth of the culture.

BNP Paribas shows its limits in visually communicating the Islamic and conventional banking where they could have used implicit religious symbols representative of Islam and of the deeper culture more appropriate to symbolise Bahrain and the Middle East. In fact, one marketing theory stipulates that for the creation and selling of purely Islamic products, corporate should use at least one of the five pillars of Islam in their communication media. This has not been applied to the BNP Paribas's communication strategy. Even for Islamic banking Najmah, the bank chose not to represent any explicit religious symbols except for the Eid and Ramadan cards and for the internal structure of the bank where prayer rooms and special hours have been set for Ramadan and Eid. One participant stated that even though the bank was creating greetings cards with

the representation of one of the pillars of Islam (e.g. Ramadan), it was not linked to a religious strategy to promote Islamic banking or the local culture. The television commercial movie for the Keep Reaching campaign is a very good example of the creation of a global culture through an accumulation of cultural stereotypes which wipe out cultural specificities and the deeper meaning of culture. BNP Paribas adopts a global view in their treatment of cultural representation and generate patterns to target as many cultures and people as possible.

5.5 Summary

Overall, through the analysis of the different material used by the bank to visually communicate with its audiences, a change of strategy over the years can be seen. It has tried to have a local adapted approach, then a glocal and global emphasis over the last two years. The underlining French culture of the bank had an implicit impact on the BNP Paribas's corporate identity in Bahrain. This French vision within the different visual communication has contributed to a specific and sometimes biased vision of the Arabic culture. It is also interesting to notice that the BNP Paribas limits its communication on superficial aspects of the Arabic culture such as the traditional dress and the Arabic male stereotype profiling and does not go deeper into the complex layers of the Islamic culture in terms of a culture largely bound by religion. The communication media are therefore representative of some important Arabic themes defined earlier by theories on cross-cultural studies. Thus, the main strategic themes that the BNP Paribas uses to build its image among the Arabic culture are: the theme of future portrayed from a Westernised perspective, the theme of family ties and generation but the most important theme is that of relationship. The bank aims to caricature an alliance between French/European and Bahraini/Middle Eastern and more generally between East and West. Through those mixed cultural symbols and diverse themes, the bank expresses and creates a global identity that does transform the essence of the meaning of culture. In trying to find a balance between the cultural origin of the bank and the local culture of Bahrain in adopting a 'glocal' strategy using bricolage stereotyping and creating cultural patterns, it falls into the trap of creating a

global culture. Moreover, this glocal and mix of symbols seems to confuse the employees as they had difficulty in defining the cultural identity and strategy of the bank. Voices were disparate in terms of implicit or explicit use of Islamic symbols that would be better suited to represent traditional Middle Eastern culture.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Suggestions and contributions

The research has proven that corporate identity was impacted by culture to a certain extent. That corporate identity original culture mostly defined by the company's logo remains the same regardless of the country in which the bank operates, but does adapt itself to the culture in terms of linguistics. For example, the BNP Paribas Najmah's logo is the same logo used in France for conventional banking but a new branding has been created to suit and reflect the bank's ambition to its Islamic clientele. Other communication media that formed the corporate identity also showed the importance of a cultural adaptation in harmony with the national cultural identity of BNP Paribas. Thus, different degrees of adaptation have been observed and therefore, the European and French culture of the bank remained strong. The adaptation to and impact of a foreign culture on the corporate identity is limited and therefore an important parameter to take into consideration for an organisation that wishes to enter into a new market. BNP Paribas's cultural interactions or cross culture have not changed the essence of the Bank's corporate identity but instead created a cultural bricolage that aims to reflect both French/European and Bahraini/Middle Eastern culture.

The research aims to explore and reflect on the impact of globalisation on cultures. The study examines how cultures are represented through globalisation and became a mix between global and local. As a result, the question of cultural specificities evolving within the concept of globalisation presents new challenges and opportunities for communication for practitioners and scholars.

In regards to the question of cross culture in multinational corporate identity in relation to Arabic and Muslim countries, further research should investigate the importance and potential impact of the cultural trends to preserve the traditional culture in the Middle East. The idea of a re-identification is becoming increasingly strong in the United Arab Emirates and we have seen examples of the different elections in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Morocco where Islamic parties won as a response

to globalisation and Westernisation in terms of modernity and secularisation which will present important challenges in terms of culture for foreign corporations who wish to operate in the Middle East and North Africa. Foreign corporations will have to better adapt and find other ways to deal with the cultural impacts of those countries; they will have to find new ways to adapt their communication strategies in regards to the sensitive question of national culture and identity in the Middle East. Another suggestion would be to focus on the question of cross cultural interaction and the power of social media for multinationals based in the Middle East. Since the Arab Spring we have witnessed a growth of social media used such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and blogs by the population to share information, express their opinion and even communicate with multinationals that could have an implicit impact on the resolution of political tensions. Looking at cultural dialogue as a process and the estimation of the cultural impact on one country and adapting its communication in regards to this tool would be a good idea.

Other opportunities for further research can be suggested using the same method. Thus, adding focus groups for further research would add more depth to the question of cross culture on corporate identity and would give to the research another (more external) perspective. The population's point of view on foreign corporate cultural displays would allow communication professionals to better understand the market and corporations to be aware of their cultural reputation.

In addition, other case studies to identify recurring patterns in other banks or industries such as luxury goods or food, would provide more insights and could generalise patterns of the potential effects of cross culture and cultural interactions on corporate identity.

This research contributes to deepening the understanding of cross-cultural interaction between the Arab/Islamic and the French/European culture in regards to corporate identity. It will help professionals in communication and marketing to be more aware of the short cuts often taken to adapt or promote cultures. This research also contributes in proposing an original methodology to analyse the BNP Paribas's visual communication media that combines semiotics and iconography in order to intensify

the analysis of the linguistic message, and symbolic cultural meanings within the cultural context.

6.2 Limitations

Several limitations within the research can be highlighted. First the selection of media. The researcher could not select all visual media because of the scope of the study and so selected only major advertisement campaigns as well as visuals that would represent cultural complexities and cross-cultural challenges. Moreover, the selection of interviewees was limited as the department of communication and communication practitioners in the region are few, as it is a new profession in the region recently introduced with the petrol and gas economic boom. Interviewees' cultural background is something that should also be taken into consideration since it directed their answers and affected their cultural judgement.

The methods used also have limitations. The use of a combination of semiotics and iconography does not guarantee correctness as it can be seen as very subjective. The researcher's own interpretation of culture is highlighted, and adds a personal dimension to the study that may not be representative of others' understanding of culture.

In addition, the cultural bias of the researcher can be questioned. As French the researcher may not always be aware of her own cultural bias and knowledge of French/European culture and may often assume that the reader knows or understands French cultural specificities. Further, data was collected during the Arab Spring, when the country's political context was very unstable. Consequently, it was not always easy to access data or to schedule interviews as many people left the country or were very stressed and preoccupied by the situation and therefore less accessible.

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