Assembling the Diasporic Nation; Kabylia at the CONIFA World Football Cup

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The power of sporting spectacles to symbolically put a place 'on the map', and for athletes' performances to represent their nations to the rest of the world, has become an established theme in scholarship on the geopolitics of sport. This chapter discusses the participation of Kabylia in the 2018 CONIFA World Football Cup in London, in which a wide variety of unrecognised states, secessionist groups and geopolitical anomalies were represented. Kabylia, a Berber-speaking region of Algeria, emerged on this international stage, mediatised and embodied primarily through the assemblage of its diaspora. The Kabylia that was presented to the world through online and mainstream media was a nation searching for its independence. However, most media coverage of Kabylia at the tournament was based upon deeply partisan nationalist discourse, presented so as to suggest that, beyond any question, Kabylia is a nation. Such a claim would have been unimaginable until recently, but the growth of Kabyle diaspora institutions is providing a space for its articulation. This chapter will analyse the role of this sporting event in the assemblage of diaspora and argue that an already existent Kabyle discourse and performance of secessionism has been further developed through CONIFA's format and mediatisation.

Introduction

In the summer of 2018, thousands of people in Algeria and the diaspora tuned in to watch and to listen as their national football team clashed with other national teams from around the world. A dedicated group of fans followed the team from venue to venue, waving the national flag and singing their support from the stands. The president and some of his officials were present at some of the more significant games. The nation was represented, national pride was at stake, and the eyes of the world, through the coverage of the international media, were upon the team. However, Algeria had not qualified for the FIFA world cup in Russia. This was the newly formed Kabyle national team competing in the CONIFA (Confederation of Independent Football Associations) World Football Cup in London, on which this chapter focuses. Other teams at the competition ranged from unrecognised states like Abkhazia and North Cyprus, and established secessionist groups like Tibet and Tamil Eelam, to geopolitical anomalies like Ellan Vannin (Isle of Man) and The United Koreans in Japan.

Though the tournament was on a scale far smaller than the more established competition taking place in Russia, the participation of this Kabyle team and the related international media attention on the Kabyle Independence Movement (*Mouvement pour l'Autodétermination de la Kabylie*, MAK), which since 2015 has called for the self-determination of Kabylia as an indigenous nation, charted new territory in North Africa's regional politics. Its immediate effects were felt in the mobilisation of the Kabyle diaspora and various reactions via online and mainstream media, but its longer-term effects remain to be seen. The Kabylia that was presented to the world through online and mainstream media during the CONIFA tournament was a nation searching for its independence. It was a territory wrongly attached to Algeria during the French colonial period, suffering marginalisation and oppression at the hands of the authoritarian Algerian state. As this chapter will unpack, however, the media coverage of Kabylia at the CONIFA World Football

Cup was based upon the deeply partisan discourse of the MAK, and presented in such a way as to suggest that, beyond any question, Kabylia is a nation. Such a claim would have been unimaginable until only recently, but regional political change ongoing since the 'Arab Spring', including the growth of Kabyle diaspora institutions, is providing a space for its articulation. This chapter will analyse the role of this sporting event in the assemblage of diaspora and argue that an already existent Kabyle discourse and performance of secessionism has been further developed through CONIFA's format and mediatisation.

Diaspora, Sport and Nationalism

The power of sporting spectacles to symbolically put a place 'on the map', and for athletes' performances to represent their nations to the rest of the world, has become an established theme in scholarship on the geopolitics of sport (Cronin and Mayall 1998, Bairner 2001, Koch 2016). In particular, the efforts of host nations and cities to portray themselves as developed or powerful have formed the focus of several recent interventions in the field (Horák 2017, Koch 2018, Won and Chiu 2018). International sporting events are excellent examples of Billig's classic concept of 'banal nationalism' (1995), where the national 'symbolic repertoire' of flags, colours, and anthems are deployed as a matter of course (Koch 2013). Global audiences have grown accustomed to seeing a national flag displayed alongside names on the leader boards of the Tour de France or the Grand Prix, for example, despite the transnational make-up of the teams that compete. At the FIFA World Cup national symbols are constantly reproduced, from the colours that teams wear, to the songs that fans sing, to the style of play on the field. CONIFA exposes and makes explicit the power relations that are reinforced through such practices, by replicating the same national symbolic repertoire but for many of the world's stateless nations and secessionist groups. Such an exposure threatens polities that have succeeded in normalizing their national status over that of these other groups, prompting resistance to CONIFA's activities. For example, several sponsors representing thousands of pounds of funding withdrew from the 2018 tournament when Tibet was included, and the Cypriot High Commission wrote to the London non-league clubs hosting the matches to encourage them to withdraw too: "Irrespective of what CONIFA likes to call itself, it is an association that provides an umbrella network for illegal secessionist entities purportedly to play football" (Cypriot Embassy to the UK, cited in Hendicott, 2019). The geopolitics of this sporting event were decidedly international in scale, whilst the city where the tournament took place, London, was only significant in that it is home to numerous diasporas. As such, the tournament represents a unique field for the study not just of sport and secessionism, but more broadly for nationalism and the geopolitics of diaspora.

Scholarly uses of the term 'diaspora' range widely, having several meanings across and often within disciplines (Brubaker 2005, Faist 2010). We must therefore ask: what kind of diaspora emerged to support the Kabyle team at the CONIFA world cup? The cultural studies approach that popularised the term in the humanities in the 1990s evoked diaspora as a metaphor for cultural difference and hybridity that lies outside the dominant cultural narrative. Whilst helpful for theorising the socio-cultural effects of living away from 'home', this approach is often individualised and placeless despite evoking spatial themes (Brah 1996). A second approach, taken by scholars studying diaspora from a political science perspective, theorises it as the population of a given nation-state residing outside its borders. It is mostly concerned with state politics, for example; state 'diaspora outreach' (Koinova 2010), the projection of power beyond borders (Gamlen 2008), the governance of expatriate citizens (Dickinson 2017), and the harnessing of diaspora resources for homeland

development (Mullings 2012). As such, this work foregrounds states as the primary actors in defining and structuring diasporas. However, the Kabyle diaspora that was made briefly visible during the CONIFA competition constitutes neither of these kinds of diaspora. It is not a non-essentialised narrative of individual identity, disconnected from place and materiality, but neither is it defined and structured by a Kabyle state engaging in 'diaspora outreach'.

A more suitable approach to diaspora defines it as a process, wherein the boundaries of nation, state, community and identity are (de)constructed (Mavroudi 2007). When conceptualised in this way, the making of a Kabyle diaspora can be analysed as part of a wider geopolitical context constantly undergoing a process of assemblage (Dittmer 2014, Barrineau 2015, Dickinson 2017). Existing work on geopolitical assemblages has drawn on arguments originating in sociology and the study of social movements. Sökefeld's work on Sikh, Kashmiri and Tamil diasporas argues for a focus on "the formation of diaspora [as] an issue of social mobilization [to counter] primordialist and essentializing approaches" (2006, p. 268), citing Sidney Tarrow's description of social movements' activities beyond contentious politics: "they build organizations, elaborate ideologies, and socialize and mobilize constituencies, and their members engage in self-development and the construction of collective identities" (1998, p. 3), partly through their 'framing'. Movements actively 'frame' their concerns in relation to their constantly changing contexts, and diasporas are similar in this respect. Framing practices define what is relevant or irrelevant to a given issue, through processes of articulation. Brubaker argues that on this basis diaspora should be treated "as a category of practice, project, claim and stance, rather than as a bounded group". Going further, he explains that "the 'groupness' of putative diasporas, like that of putative 'nations', is precisely what is at stake" (2005, p. 13). Geographers have similarly highlighted the ambivalent, uncertain interpretations of national identity, particularly in diasporas (Mavroudi 2007, 2008), but this article will make use of Brubaker's term 'groupness', which emphasises the collectivity of identity formation that is key to senses of diaspora and nation. The mobilisation of diaspora communities reshapes imaginative geographies of the nation 'at home', particularly in the absence of an established 'home' nation-state (Anderson 1992). As Mulligan has put it: "Although it is commonly assumed that national identity grows organically within the territory of the nation or state, I contend that it might also emerge from the margins - forged by diasporas" (2002, p. 221).

This chapter draws on two years of fieldwork with Kabyle diaspora activists, and interviews with players, fans and politicians during CONIFA 2018, to produce an account of the changing geopolitics of the Kabyle diaspora. It unpacks the diaspora-scripted imaginative geographies of nationhood, and the work that they do, by approaching the diaspora as 'process' (Mavroudi 2007, Barrineau 2015). As such, the discourses and practices of Kabyle participants in the CONIFA World Cup 2018 are analysed as a particular moment within an ongoing process of shaping the 'groupness' of the diaspora and in so doing reimagining the geography of Kabylia. First, the chapter outlines how ideas of Kabyle nationhood have developed and continue to develop in the process of diaspora, rather than emerging only in Kabylia itself. It then analyses the geopolitics at play during the Kabyle team's 2018 campaign. For the MAK and its supporters, it was certainly the taking part that counted, as it provided opportunities for media exposure and a platform for diaspora mobilisation in a country with weak diaspora institutions. Finally, it considers the role of social media in not only diffusing the games, but shaping and cementing ideas of Kabyle nationhood in the process.

Kabylia and CONIFA 2018

Kabylia is a mountainous region in the north of Algeria, immediately to the east of the capital, Algiers. Home to roughly 5 million people, the region has no official status but is widely understood to encompass at its core the *wilayas* of Tizi-Ouzou, Bejaia and Bouira. Whereas the surrounding cities and plains progressively 'Arabised' since the arrival of the Islam in the seventh century, Kabylia has retained its indigenous Amazigh (Berber)[1] language and culture, by virtue of the remoteness and density of its hilltop villages. It was the last part of the Algerian littoral to be annexed by the French army, and Kabyles earned a reputation with their French rulers for fierce independence, and supposedly secular and democratic customs (Lorcin 1999, Roberts 2014). Through the twentieth century, a disproportionately high number of Kabyles and other Amazigh moved to France for work and study, the sons of whom are among some of France's most celebrated footballers (Zinedine Zidane, Karim Benzema). In modern Algeria, regional difference has made Kabylia the home of Berberism, resisting the post-independence state's attempts to establish Arabic as the sole, indigenous language of Algerian society (Aïtel 2014). *Jeunesse Sportive de Kabylie* (JSK), whose past glories include being crowned Algeria and all-African champions several times, is based in Tizi-Ouzou. During the 1970s, the club was a rare outlet for the expression of Amazigh identity, but was forced to change its name to erase the mention of Kabylia (Dine 2017). Persistent and widespread popular protest in 1980, celebrated as the 'Berber Spring', established Kabylia as a bastion of cultural resistance at a time when Amazigh identity seemed consigned to history. Every year since, on April 21st, Kabyles have organised marches and demonstrations to celebrate the Berber Spring. In 2001, these celebrations turned to riots as the police lethally repressed this popular mobilisation, killing more than 120 young Kabyles (Lacoste-Dujardin 2001). This event is now commemorated as the 'Black Spring', and for many Kabyles underlines a sense of regional and cultural marginalisation within Algeria.

Conservative estimates number the Kabyle diaspora in Europe, which acts as a mirror and amplifier for Amazigh activism, at well over 1 million. Amazigh associations have been a staple of local associative life in many French and Belgian towns and cities since the 1980s and are becoming increasingly established in Quebec. Kabyle performers such as Idir and Lounis Aït Menguellet play to crowds of thousands in Paris and Montreal. Every year several thousand teenagers in France take the *baccalauréat* in Kabyle, even though no French school offers the course as part of its curriculum. This well-established diaspora has a long history of radical Amazigh activism (Aïtel 2013), most recently becoming home to Kabylia's self-styled 'government in exile', the *Anavad*, led by the celebrity singer-turned-politician Ferhat Mehenni. Since its declaration in 2010, the *Anavad* has developed the national independence movement (the MAK), describing Kabylia as an indigenous territory under occupation which must be given the opportunity to exercise self-determination (Mehenni 2017). Despite having some popular support within Kabylia, most of its ministers live in the diaspora where they can operate without fear of arrest or censorship. Much of the *Anavad'*s activity is focused on what McConnell (2016) has termed 'Rehearsing the State' through the institution of state-like functions such as issuing identity cards and conducting diplomacy with other state-like actors, for example within the European Free Alliance (EFA) or the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisation (UNPO). Such practices necessitate performances of nationhood, whether through flag-waving (the *Anavad* organised a popular vote to decide on the design of

[1] I have privileged the use of the ethnonym "Amazigh" over "Berber", but the reader will see that there are times when it was appropriate to use one as opposed to the other. Both refer to the non-Arabic, indigenous people of North Africa.

its new national flag in 2015) or singing the national anthem, (written by Ferhat Mehenni in 2010), and have seen the established Amazigh diaspora in France become more 'Kabylised' (Harris 2019). Each year, in commemoration of the Black Spring, the *Anavad* has organised a march of thousands of Kabyles in Paris. Each of these practices contributes to shaping the emergent diaspora and therefore nation of Kabylia, adding visibility and some measure of political legitimacy to the *Anavad*. The new national football team's participation in the CONIFA world football cup provided a high-profile opportunity for the Kabyle diaspora-nation to emerge, to assemble, to be shaped.

The Kabyle team was something *Anavad* activists had dreamt about for a long time, and as with many *Anavad* initiatives, was a personal project of Ferhat Mehenni's. Football's power to mobilise feelings of belonging had been clear within the Amazigh Movement for decades, with the JSK the de facto team of Amazigh everywhere (Silverstein 2002, 2013)**.** Each time Algeria played, gaining some success in the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Kabyle activists were conflicted. Their love of the game and pride in their compatriots (many in the Algerian squad have Kabyle origins) clashed with their rejection of the Arabo-Islamic Algerian identity explicitly performed by 'the only Arab team' of the 2010 and 2014 FIFA World Cups, whose media coverage centred on observing Islamic rituals of prayer and fasting during the month of Ramadan (Dine 2017). As a consequence, *Anavad* ministers were mentioning the project of a Kabyle team, based in Paris, as early as 2015. The right context for such a team to emerge arrived in 2018 with the CONIFA world cup in London – easily reachable for a team drawn from the diaspora. CONIFA is an umbrella organisation for football associations unaffiliated with FIFA, which presents itself as a "global acting non-profit organization that supports representatives of international football teams from nations, de-facto nations, regions, minority peoples and sports isolated territories" (CONIFA 2019). The London competition was the third it had organised, and was a far larger operation than the previous tournaments in Abkhazia and Suomi, attracting higher participation and media exposure by virtue of its situation in such a global city (Hendicott 2019). In order to qualify, the Kabyle team played a series of friendly matches, accruing enough points to progress to the competition. Due to the timing of these qualifying games, falling in the summer when French teams were on vacation, the qualifying team was put together in Kabylia. However, the final team was mostly made up of players drawn from the lower tiers of the French league, a goalkeeper from Canada, and only six players coming from Kabylia itself. According to manager Aksel Bellabaci, this was always the plan. The team was first conceived of in Paris, and always aimed to draw players mostly from the diaspora.

Similarly, the supporters that attended the CONIFA tournament were already living in Europe. By coming together around the games, they embodied and constituted the Kabyle diaspora-as-process. MAK supporters from Paris organised a coach to transport around forty fans to London for the tournament, and sold the team's shirts in their cafes and businesses to raise money for the team. The *Anavad*'s media team travelled with them to report on the tournament, including interviews with the athletes and *Anavad* ministers and Kabyle-language match commentary broadcast on their Facebook-hosted channel Taqvaylit.TV. This meant that each game Kabylia played had a quorum of fans, who were already prepared for performances of nationalism, waving their new national flags and singing the new national anthem. These fans would form the backdrop for all media coverage of the Kabyle team's progress, earning a reputation as "CONIFA's most passionate separatists" (Hendicott 2019) and featuring in several journalists' articles covering the tournament (e.g. Andrei 2018, CNN 2018, RTBE 2018). As we will unpack later, as emotive as it was for fans and players for

Kabylia to be represented as a nation within the CONIFA tournament, it was also vital to the *Anavad* that it curate Kabylia's image.

Whilst the backbone of the Kabyle support was made up of convinced MAK activists, several Kabyles living in the UK came to spectate, curious about the idea of a national Kabylia football team. Some heard through word of mouth, often from UK-based acquaintances who were following one of the other teams, and many others had seen it through social media. Achour had heard of the tournament from Tibetan friends and told me that arriving at the ground to see Kabylia play was an "emotional, happy moment". As Kabyle and Tibetan teams exchanged gifts and signs of peace prior to the match, Achour was meeting the other Kabyles, who were telling him about the MAK's activities in the UK. Although many Kabyles have made the UK their home in recent decades, only one association existed prior to the CONIFA tournament, organised as an Amazigh cultural association. In comparison with France and Canada, Amazigh diaspora practices in the UK have been small-scale and short-lived (Harris 2015). The CONIFA tournament marked a transformation of the diaspora assemblage; the existing association changed its name to 'Kabyle/Amazigh' and a new 'Kabylian Community in the UK' sprang up to organise a Berber Spring commemoration in London, inviting local politicians and a Kabyle academic to attend. The diaspora assemblage was now mobilising a notion of Kabyle national identity rather than Amazigh cultural identity, linked to a more precise and more localised geographical territory, the independence of which the *Anavad* continues to call for. This kind of diaspora mobilisation is of course what the *Anavad* was hoping to achieve, just as it has transformed diaspora framing practices in France and Canada, 'Kabylising' them (see Harris 2019).

Part II – Assembling the diasporic nation

Existing scholarship on the geopolitics of diaspora has demonstrated how diasporas decentre state categories (Barrineau 2015), and reconfigure territory through transnational practices (Carter 2005, McConnell 2013). The Kabyle diaspora assemblage around the CONIFA tournament did both of these things, through embodying and performing a territorially defined nation amongst other nations. The minds behind the concept of assemblage, Deleuze and Guattari, wrote that "every assemblage is basically territorial… [t]he territory makes the assemblage" (2003, pp. 503–4). This is often taken to mean that every assemblage must be grounded in its localised spatio-political context, and political geographers have used this concept to look in fine detail at the geopolitics of localized spaces and terrains such as borders and refugee camps (Megoran 2006, Ramadan 2013, Squire 2015). However, in the case of diaspora assemblage this context is transnational, uniting spatially non-contiguous territories, polities and structures. Interconnectedness through various media and communication technologies plays a key role in the contemporary geopolitics of diaspora, with multimedia social platforms like Facebook having a particular effect (Bernal 2018, Harris 2020). The *representation* of Kabylia in diaspora at the CONIFA tournament was two-fold: the nation was embodied through gathering and mobilising, and the nation was displaued through performance and mediatisation. Speaking to me during the tournament, *Anavad* Sports Minister Sab Ammar Khodja explained; "There was a double interest for us in participating in the CONIFA tournament – it brought us together as Kabyles and made us visible to the world". This 'double interest' will be unpacked for the remainder of the chapter.

It was clear throughout that for the Kabyle activists, their team's performance on the pitch was immaterial to the success of their tournament. As Kabylia lost 8-0 to Panjab in their opening game in Slough, fans continued to cheer, and the man next to me turned to say: "The

result isn't important. It's the qualification, the training, the Kabylisation, the independence". Favourite chants from the stands included *Anwar wiggi? Iqvayliyen!* (Who are these people? Kabyles!) and *Kabylie Indépendant* (Independent Kabylia). Self-appointed chant leader and "No. 1 fan" Alsas Aït Saɛd was there with his two UK-born daughters, in Kabyle traditional dress. He told me he didn't care for the MAK but was there for Kabylia. It was important for him that his daughters be in a Kabyle context, hear the language, and hopefully have good memories later in life to keep them "attached to their culture". Another pair of fans had journeyed two hours from Brighton, one wearing a JSK jersey, the other the brand new Kabylia national strip modelled on the *Anavad*'s national flag. They were similarly excited to be amongst "their people" for the first time in the UK, and kept asking others around them when the next meetings would be after the tournament. For the fans, the opportunity to 'be Kabyle' together was clearly a part of the attraction - to wear Kabyle clothes and speak Kabyle, and in so doing to embody the nation. Far more than merely being passive spectators or consumers of the competition, Kabyle supporters participated with their time and resources by hosting visiting fans and *Anavad* members, transporting them to and from events, and getting items such as astro-turf football boots for some of the players. Aman spoke about the supporters' participation gratefully; "they have come from all over, their sacrifices are appreciated".

Beyond the fans, the sporting nature of the CONIFA tournament necessitated the bodily representation of the nation on the pitch through its players. During the tournament, the team became the embodiment of Kabylia, despite being mostly drawn from the diaspora. Belabucci was emphatic; "It's beautiful, we've brought together Kabyles from four continents to play […] we've created a family here in London". He explained that all players trialling for the squad were required to "be Kabyle", to be "a team that speaks in [Kabylia's] name, that speaks Kabyle, that represents the Kabyle identity". It is well established that legitimacy of certain athletes to represent their nations, particularly those with dual-nationality or immigrant parents, is frequently put into question at major international sporting events as a way of policing the boundaries of the national (Cronin and Mayall 1998). Nationality tests are technically irrelevant in the CONIFA competition, as the teams are classified as 'members' and not 'nations' (Hendicott 2019), however for the Kabyle team and others, proof of national identity was important. Indeed, the tournament was nearly derailed by a dispute over the inclusion of an ex-Libyan international in the Barawa squad, which led to Ellan Vannin pulling out in protest. Kabylia's criteria for nationality were not made explicit; players did not need to speak Kabyle, have an *Anavad*-issued Kabyle Identity Card or Kabyle parents, or live in Kabylia, however all players were legimitised by some combination of these. A dialogic process of self-identification and community validation, inherent in every assertion of 'Kabyle' identity, is made explicit in this example. This dialogic process is identical to the constant reproduction of "groupness" in diaspora as "a category of practice, project, claim and stance" (Brubaker 2005, p. 13), as the Kabyle diaspora negotiates and reshapes the meanings, symbols and geographies of the emergent Kabyle nation.

If the Kabyle nation was gathered and performed physically at the games, it was also networked and represented transnationally through the mediatisation of the tournament. The internet is a key political opportunity structure for contemporary diasporas. It allows diasporas to mobilize, network and communicate within and beyond their memberships. Matches were broadcast live on the internet by CONIFA partner mycujoo.tv, with over 8,000 tuning in to watch Kabylia's first game against Panjab. The numbers engaging on social media were far higher, however, as over 124,000 watched via the *Anavad*'s Facebook-hosted

channel Taqvaylit.tv. Belabucci explained; “I’m really surprised to see how many people are watching us play [online]. It’s inspiring […] since our 8-0 win [against Tibet] all the social media sites, the Kabyle pages, were saturated with images of our team”. The pages Belabucci was referring to, such as “*Les Kabyles de Londres*”, “*Tous pour un État Kabyle*”, or “*L’Ambiance Kabyle*”, for example, regroup several thousands of users who post content on Kabyle culture and identity several times a day. These groups, whose members are not necessarily pro-MAK, nonetheless create spaces that are avowedly Kabyles. A Kabyle ‘groupness’ is fashioned by and through these groups, as distinct from the ‘Algerian’ or even the ‘Amazigh’, which the *Anavad* then seeks to represent. Mediatisation reached beyond established Kabyle online networks, however. Before the tournament *Anavad* ambassador to the UK Anazar U Chavah explained that “[gaining visibility] in the UK is more important than in France, in France it’s a [media] blackout”. Despite staging large demonstrations in Paris, the *Anavad* has struggled to attract any mainstream media coverage in France or Algeria, something its ministers blame on the collusion of Franco-Algerian interests. The London games provided an opportunity to change this, and *Anavad* ministers were ecstatic when mainstream international media organisations such as *Le Monde, The Guardian, The New York Times* and *CNN* reported on the games, naming Kabylia and describing its territory and its people as the *Anavad* represented it.

Ho and McConnell "propose that diasporas function as diplomatic actors in their own right […] realizing alternative political projects through their interactions with the other social actors found in diaspora assemblages" (2019, p. 11), and *Anavad* president Ferhat Mehenni certainly treated his time in London as a diplomatic exercise. Accompanied by the newly appointed “Kabyle ambassador to the UK”, who referred to the games as “sporting diplomacy” he gave talks in Cambridge and London defending the project of Kabyle independence, signing and selling copies of his ‘Memorandum for the Independence of Kabylia’ (Mehenni 2017). He also created a diplomatic incident by choosing this moment to call on Kabyles to organise a ‘security organisation’ to defend their communities rather than trust the Algerian authorities. He explicitly linked his broadcast to Charles de Gaulle’s ‘*Appel de Londres*’ rallying the French resistance in 1940, and succeeded in eliciting a public response from Algerian authorities and politicians who saw his speech as a divisive and dangerous call to arms which might lead to violence. Though Mehenni’s *appel* did little to change the situation on the ground in Kabylia, it articulated the *Anavad*’s desire for Kabylia to be visible to the world as a nation seeking independence, exemplified in its team’s emergence alongside more well-known stateless nations with established diplomatic institutions, such as Tibet.

The Kabylia that was presented to the world, then, was a nation searching for its independence, a territory wrongly attached to Algeria during the French colonial period, suffering marginalisation and oppression at the hands of the authoritarian Algerian state. The *Anavad* was the Kabyle ‘government in exile’, the legitimate representatives of the Kabyle people, its ministers speaking on their behalf in numerous pitch side interviews. Reports focused on how the players had risked arrest to play at the games, and their families had faced intimidation and threats back in Kabylia. Maps of Kabylia correlated to the territorial claim of the MAK, which in reality extend far wider than its core regions of popular support. Of course, there is a measure of truth to this representation of Kabylia, and this is not to claim that it is necessarily false. Whilst they were a minority, some players certainly had to overcome resistance to their participation, and Kabylia definitely does exist as a distinct cultural region within Algeria. The media coverage of Kabylia at the CONIFA World Football Cup, however, was based upon the deeply partisan discourse of the MAK, and

presented in such a way as to suggest that, beyond any question, Kabylia is a nation. Such a claim would have been impossible only a decade ago, and remains a live debate even within Amazigh circles. In representing Kabylia as a nation to the Kabyle viewers and rest of the world, with its flags and its football team, the mediatisation of the CONIFA tournament adds weight to the claim that Kabylia is indeed a nation. Such a change in popular perceptions would have ramifications across North Africa, where regional political change is ongoing since the 'Arab Spring' and where other Amazigh groups are beginning to call for great recognition and autonomy (Maddy-Weitzman 2015).

Conclusion

Whilst not the case for every member team of CONIFA, joining and competing was performative of an intended future national independence for the Kabyle team, due to the *Anavad*'s central role in organising its participation. Aksel Belabucci claimed that "without Ferhat Mehenni, the President, there would never have been a Kabyle national football team". Despite this he insisted that the team was "for all Kabyles, not just the team of the MAK", hinting at what this chapter has sought to argue, that the Kabyle team at the CONIFA World Football Cup mobilised a Kabyle diaspora-nation, an assemblage of practices and discourses that framed the spaces Kabylia and its nationhood. By bringing players and supporters together in the name of Kabylia, complete with the symbols of nationality now expected at international sporting events, the tournament helped reshape the faintly existing Amazigh diaspora in the UK into a more Kabyle diaspora with links to the MAK. The mediatisation of the spectacle, greatly helped by social media, meant that this representation of Kabylia as a nation, which is so contentious in Kabylia itself, was on display for hundreds of thousands of Kabyles. The mainstream media coverage of the tournament introduced Kabylia to new international audiences and did so in a way that largely followed the MAK's script. Taken along with Mehenni's *Appel de Londres* Kabylia's tournament was an act of secession, performed in diaspora, through the medium of sport.

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