

# Hors Place: Discursive Identities of the Modern Franco Kabyle

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## ABSTRACT

This paper uses the ethnographic experiences of myself and other transnational individuals to ground an understanding of identity affiliation among the French *Kabyle* (a group of Algerian Berbers) diaspora. The analysis starts by abridging the sociohistorical dynamics of France and Algeria's complex colonial and postcolonial relationship as it contributes to producing narratives of paradigmatic Franco-*Kabylité* (being-of Kabyle, or "Kabyleness"). I then turn to how individuals contend these influences and express their Franco-Kabyle particularities through negotiation—a conscious street-level process of navigating the friction imposed by Franco-Kabylité—and how/where it manifests, including ethnographic promenades through two Franco-Kabyle neighborhoods in Paris: Barbès and Belleville. Supplemented by a series of autoethnographically rich encounters with a particular fieldwork correspondent, I conclude by analyzing how negotiating Franco-*Kabylité* fosters community bonds and consider the evolution of my own identity over the course of my research.

**Keywords:** identity negotiation, French-Kabyle, French Studies, Paris

*“Avec l’espoir que notre effort n’ait pas été vain,  
que l’élève n’ait pas été trop indigne du maître,  
et que soit entendue enfin cette parole que  
tu ne cesses de psalmodier en pensant à moi,  
cette parole que les vieilles femmes de  
chez nous ont lancée vers le ciel, à ton  
intention, comme une graine de bonheur”*

(“With the hope that our effort wasn’t in vain,  
that my child hasn’t failed her progenitor, and  
that she will have finally heard the words you  
do not cease to sing in thinking of me, the  
words that the old women of our land shout at  
the sky for you, like the fruiting of joy.”)

- Taos Amrouche (1966, 7)

This, an address to her mother on the hope for her daughter, is how Francophone Kabyle novelist Taos Amrouche prefaces *Le Grain magique*, a 1966 French-language anthology of Kabyle tales, poems, and sayings—the literary preservation of centuries of oral tradition whose craft was guided by the voice of her mother. Born in 1916 in Tunis to a family in exile hundreds of miles from the native beaches and mountains of northeastern Algeria due to their Catholic faith, Amrouche nevertheless remained closely tied to her ancestral home through the stories of her mother; as adults, she and her brothers would make frequent visits back to Béjaïa to reclaim their cultural patrimony (Sadouni 2017). She interrogated the troubled relationships of belonging to and estrangement from her Kabyle roots through the corpus of her autobiographical narratives wherein, caught between multiple cultures, Amrouche explores her dual allegiances to the traditionalism of the Kabyle she knew of through her mother and the worldliness she found in Tunis and later in France; as most purposefully explored in *Rue*

*des Tambourins*, she finds no satisfaction in either identity beyond its negotiation, a fact affirmed until her death in 1976 (Sadouni 2017). Ultimately, then, her eminence as a Kabyle writer was not garnered through her inherent *Kabylité*—a being-of Kabyle, “Kabyleness”—but rather by how she negotiates and documents it (Sadouni 2017).

I see myself within the work of Taos Amrouche. French-born yet American-raised, I was regaled with tales of my homeland and of the country we had immigrated from—the snowcapped peaks and verdant valleys of the Tell Atlas Mountains, afternoons spent in the garden of our quaint residence in the Parisian banlieues and visits to family up north in Nancy—in central Texas in the southern United States. Equally the child of a German-American mother and Kabyle father, I fought to maintain a connection with my Kabyle roots despite my distance from them; I appreciated its potency in my upbringing—in the blessings we performed monthly, the language spoken to me and on the phone, and the food whose ingredients we could only source from a small store tucked away downtown—whose resultant difference I believed could explain the estrangement I felt from others around me. Thus, and with no other outstanding Kabyle influences in my life, I sourced its nascent awareness from the reproductions of my father: a strictly stoic, stubborn, and practical man. Consequently, my conception of *Kabylité* was entirely dependent on our interpersonal relationship, including its strain: my inability to speak our native language remains a tense spot in my self-identification for us, and my coming out was, according to him, the “worst thing to have happened to [him],” as “there are no gays in Algeria!” Though our relationship has thankfully since mended and he remains proud of my decision to reconnect with the culture, he denies my capacity to embody any valid Kabyle identity—to him, I will always be American. I still felt *hors place*—out of place.

Evidently, although I had little idea to what extent, the basis of my Kabyle identity was informed by my relationship with my father, whom I conflated *Kabylité* with what he embodied; alongside being my father the Kabyle, he epitomized what every other Kabyle must look, be, and think. However, my father’s

*Kabylité* was as subjectively influenced by his relationships as mine was, borne from his experiences growing up in post-war Algeria and as a first-generation student and professional in France during the 1990s and 2000s. His, like mine and like Amrouche's, was wrought from the intersection of overarching societal contexts and his experiences relationally to them. It is from this realization that I seek to understand definitions and expressions of identity in the modern French Kabyle/Franco-Kabyle diaspora and its contexts—circumstances with which I identify and that encompass a larger community to which I can relate myself and my father. Starting by abridging the sociohistorical dynamics of France and Algeria's complex colonial and postcolonial relationship as it pertains to the Kabyle, I find that lived expressions of Franco-*Kabylité* are consciously mediated primarily through individual negotiations within its contexts—explored here as a collection of sites—and its multifaceted reproductions by other Franco-Kabyles.

To produce this research, I lived and conducted ethnographic fieldwork of Franco-Kabyle communities and community spaces in the Paris metropole, primarily the neighborhoods of Barbès and Belleville in the city's northeastern eighteenth and twentieth subdivisional *arrondissements* respectively, from September to December 2023. My fieldwork employed urban participant observation, informal recorded interviews, continual online ethnography of Franco-Kabyle influencers, autoethnographic reflection, and amateur videography as qualitative research methods.

## Franco-Kabyle Sociohistorical Context

The Kabyle are native to the politically undefined nation of *Kabylia*, geographically defined by the Tell Atlas mountain range of northeastern Algeria. Due to the obstructive limitations of its mountainous terrain, Kabylia's settlement landscape mostly consists of collections of isolated pastoral villages spread across mountain valleys and ridges. Beyond the Tell Atlases, the Kabyle are one of many Amazigh groups present in Algeria: the

endonym for the group of non-Arab Berber peoples residing across North Africa prior to Arab migration into the region. As such, many militant Amazigh and Kabyle nationalists construct a national mythology of cultural perseverance in the face of colonial erasure—territorial, artifactual, and linguistic (Anderson 2006; Harris 2022b; Tabti Kouidri 2011).

Following France's colonial expansion into Algeria from the early to mid-nineteenth century, one early external logic undergirding the institutions of its occupying military and civil domination was the Kabyle Myth, a racial project informed by early French ethnologies of Kabylia and their implicit colonial-era racial ideologies (Hanoune 2016; Martel 2012). By virtue of their perceived assimilability to (but not submissiveness under) French systems of value and work, the idea of the paradigmatic eastern "*Montagnard*" was constructed as the noble savage relative to the western Arab plain peoples, whose bloody subjugation and economic nomadism were in opposition to Kabyle civility, due to their nature as a not easily subjugated, trade-based, non-religious, and hardworking people living in sedentary pastoral homes (Fois 2016; Martel 2012; Sayad 1994). Additionally, historian Philippe Martel (2012, 174–75) posits the project as rooted in phenotypic prejudice: the Kabyle possessing ..."*l'aspect somme toute bien Européen, voire bien nordique,*" [an entirely European appearance, seen as Nordic] as contrasted to the Arab, "... (*qui*) *est brun de poil et de peau,*" [with brown hair and skin].

When Kabylia eventually fell to French domination in 1852, this colonially imposed distinction between eastern Kabyles and western Arabs facilitated preferential French infrastructural investment into Kabylia (Sayad 1994). Another informing logic was of the *indigène*, assigned to native peoples inhabiting the land before French conquest, the censal classification conferred the status of a French national legally distinct from a citizen (*Français*) within its colonial acquisitions and thus susceptible to administrative oppression (Blevis 2003; Thénault 2017). Under the Judicial Statute of Algeria's Indigènes, both Arab and Kabyle subjects were legally recognized as *indigènes* until the last vestiges of French control over Algeria, thus both were denied the legitimacy of

full citizenship (Silverstein 2008; Thil and Moulin 2023). The legacy of these foundational colonial logics and their intersection influenced the dynamics of French Kabyle migration and how its history is contended (Harris 2022b; Khellil 1994; Sayad 1994).

The earliest Kabyle immigrants were young blue-collar workers and soldiers mobilized to fulfil the demands of a modernizing, early twentieth-century France, settling predominantly amongst themselves in the urban peripheries of Paris and the industrialized Northeast (Beaman 2019; Hamid 2022; Sayad 1994). This initial population of Franco-Kabyles, though small in number, comprised most Algerians in France (Khellil 1994; Sayad 1994). The migratory flow intensified during and after the Algerian War of Independence in the 1950s–60s, primarily comprising young workers seeking economic stability but including many Kabyle intellectuals and activists fleeing political suppression in a post-independence Arabist Algeria (Collyer 2008; Hamid 2022; Khellil 1994). The increasing salience of this diaspora spurred the onset of cultural *associations* as community-oriented centers of knowledge production, consumption, and solidarity from which *Kabylité* could be articulated, both across the developing scholar-activist network of Kabyle academics at French universities and among local communities of blue-collar workers (Anderson 2006; Collyer 2008; Hamid 2022; Harris 2022a).

In 1974, the French government issued an ordinance restricting non-European worker migration partially in an effort to stem the flow of Maghrebi immigration; however, contrary to its underlying intent, the passage of this ordinance encouraged resident Franco-Kabyles to bring over families and settle permanently in France, many of whom resided in mass-produced apartments and public housing in ill-serviced and overpoliced suburbs sequestered from city centers (Beaman 2017; 2019; Hamid 2022; Sayad 1995). Heightening tensions between this marginally situated suburban populace and hostile French institutions sparked the nationally evocative 1983 March for Equality and against Racism, through which its participants, notably second-generation French-Maghrebis, demanded legitimacy in French political discourse and, from the myth reified in

its aftermath, consciously affirmed a uniquely French racialized '*beur*' identity (Hadj-Belgacem and Nasri 2018a; 2018b). As political unrest emerged in Kabylia and Algeria at large between the 1980s–early 2000s, nationalist Kabyle activists sought refuge along pre-existing transnational networks with France, sharing political thought on Kabyle revindication within its diasporic spaces (Collyer 2008; Tabti Kouidri 2011). In the twenty-first century, the Franco-Kabyle diaspora is characterized by its multiplicity, encompassing individuals across gender, age, class, and migrant status spectrums who reside diffusely in France (Hamid 2022). Moreover, Franco-*Kabylité* is acknowledged as distinct within both contemporary French and Algerian racial schemas through socio-historical attachments, articulated both in and outside its own terms (Collyer 2008; Silverstein 2008).

## Lived Kabylité and Questions of Identity

The overarching context of the Franco-Kabyle sociohistorical relationship betrays the complexity of Franco-*Kabylité*. Simultaneously integral to France's Algerian projects yet unable to escape its marginalizing effects, disinherited by Algeria while core to its diaspora's makeup, comprised in a larger French-Maghrebi moment yet distinguished in the reproduction of uniquely ethnic knowledge—Franco-*Kabylité* cannot entirely relate to either Frenchness or Algerianness. The role of *Kabylité* as a contested intermediary produces a uniquely unacknowledgeable marginality within the French racial schema; the Franco-Kabyle exist hors place.

However, people do not wholly embody Franco-*Kabylité* nor the socio-history that informs it. Rather, personal expressions of Franco-Kabyle identity are more adequately explored as how individuals navigate the friction of larger influences while retaining a sense of integrity to oneself. Thus, I argue here that although the realities of their postcolonial context do dispose broader affiliations, the expression of individual Franco-Kabyle identities is rather best understood as processes of street-level negotiation with these

influences: what they define, how they are expressed, and who they implicate.

### What does it mean to be Kabyle?

*Kabylité* is self-evidently central to Franco-Kabyles; however, it cannot be universalized. The apparent diversity of those who identify with it on a street level challenges even the idea of a singular *Kabylité* around which to orient. Rather, I noticed that multiple interrelated discourses articulate a constructed knowledge system from which abstract definitions of a particular *Kabylité* contextually coalesce. Thus, and especially to the transnational community that must directly navigate it, conceptions of Franco-*Kabylité* and its practice remain disparate.

Late September—informed by an errant flyer online, I found myself at the Open House of Kabylia [*Journée des Portes Ouvertes de la Kabylie*] exposition in Châtillon, a banlieue southeast of Paris; passing under the elevated Châtillon-Montrouge terminus station, I emerged on the arterial *Avenue de Paris*, walking past new high-rise buildings—with façades of both imposing glass and contrived imitations of Haussmann—and mathematically equidistant tree canopies along well-kept streets. The open house was held in the *Espace Maison Blanche*, the municipal exposition hall not far from the metro station. Along the outer vitrines, impossible to miss, hung calls to all curious passers-by: two vibrantly colored Amazigh flags (a blue, green, and yellow tricolor overlaid by a red letter *yaz* (ⵝ)) from the open doors, hastily taped-up showing times, alongside several printed copies of the aforementioned flyer in strict succession.

Venturing beyond the doors and into the hall, I was confronted immediately by the diversity of offerings available to peruse. Most of the exposition was dedicated to vendor tables: artisans selling all manner of hand-crafted jewelry, clothing, fabrics, weaves, and pottery, local booksellers and well-renowned authors poised among stacks of books, art—both in the style of traditional embroidery patterns and modern representationalist expressions—hung from wire displays, and a small canteen in the back with cloth-covered

and plastic-wrapped bundles of homemade food for purchase. People bustled through the stalls and conversed amongst themselves, exchanging heartfelt *bises* and how-are-yous in Tamazight Taqbaylit, the Kabyle language, introducing compatriots and shepherded children. Among the attendees drifted a small news crew for the online publication *BerbèreTV*, occasionally interviewing bejeweled vendors or event personnel for their affiliations with and aspirations for the event. The front of the hall was dedicated to performances and showings, occurring on an elevated stage before rows of seating inadequately accommodating a now perched audience. I joined the growing crowd to see the next performer take the stage: an *acewiq* singer, a middle-aged woman sporting short blonde hair, a sharp white blazer, and a cloth of intricate weave draped around her throat. She stood to sing, an outpour of earthy tones confident enough to project beyond the microphone, the Tamazight on her tongue fluid as if it were always meant to be music and not language. As she progressed, she was joined by an entourage of *bendir*-drummers, draped in traditional Kabyle dresses mirroring the performative attire of many of the women in the hall, with the large frame-drums propped confidently on their shoulders; they sounded the beat and we reciprocated, clapping hands and clapping feet as the *acewiq* rolled on. When the performance finished, applause swelled from the audience, accompanying radiant smiles and smartphone cameras.

She again took the microphone. Hand poised pinning the cloth around her throat, she evocatively set forth a reminder that the Kabyle are of its continually threatened Tamazight, of the struggle and fortitude of its speakers to keep it alive in the face of ongoing colonialism, suppression, and displacement, and why “... *notre langue, notre tradition, c’est important de les préserver*” [“... our language, our *tradition*, are important to preserve”]. Though I did not disagree with the sentiment, her assertions read as if she had somehow missed the event: overlooked the vendors, the authors, the canteen and its home-cooked food, the interactions happening right in front of her, even the patterned weave she held at her throat. How could she, in her devotion to Tamazight, disregard the assemblage of diverse

expressions of living *Kabylité* all around her? What must our shared identity—our *Kabylité*—look like when she can only see it in the words we may or may not speak?

Most Kabyles I talked to see the national language as core to the Kabyle identity. I first met “S,” a second-generation Kabyle graduate student studying sociolinguistics, in the crowded classroom of a Tamazight language workshop when she figured out I was part American; we met after class and, circled under a streetlight and dolled up in our autumn coats, we talked about the workshop, our research (we were coincidentally both doing ethnographies on Franco-Kabyles at the same time), and, ultimately, ourselves. When asked about her *Kabylité*, she plainly affirmed that “(être) Kabyle, c’est la langue pour moi” [(being) Kabyle, for me, is its language]. For S, the acewiq singer, and others, the retention and preservation of Tamazight represent the maintenance of a metaphysical connection with the homeland and preserve *Kabylité* in the face of transnational pressures to assimilate (Ammouden 2018). The transmission of Tamazight amongst Kabyles also evokes community-esteemed traditional values—often explicitly, through performances of music and poetry: pride in our heritage, our connection to nature, and the valor of persevering and uplifting a living Kabyle culture (Ammouden 2018; Lafkioui 2013). Singers often employ *axxam* [home] to refer to family in Tamazight as opposed to the more literal *tawacult*; this embeds Kabyle social relationships as the social order of ethnic space (Ammouden 2018, 21; Harris 2022b; Silverstein 2004). The eminence of Tamazight-as-*Kabylité* is due to the perceived value of intra-community language reclamation in facilitating a communicable nation, wherein a legacy of documentation and propagation affirms its salience (Anderson 2006, 70; Berdous and Cortier 2020; Lafkioui 2013).

This particular emphasis on linguistic self-definition is thus nested within a broader political notion of *Kabylité* articulated through the replication and embodiment of interrelated ethnic paradigms. This political *Kabylité* is loosely derived from a claimed heritage of works from generations of transnational Kabyle scholar-activists and thinkers, including didactic

linguist Salem Chaker, wartime activist and singer-poet Matoub Lounès, and the literary corpus of Taos Amrouche (Harris 2022a, 2022b, Sadouni 2017, Tabti Kouidri 2011). Its disposition is rooted in its shared national mythology as anterior and continually suppressed in the Algerian homeland, manufacturing inherent distinction between Kabyles and Arabs and asserting that the Kabyle remain indigènes under Algeria’s Arabist state order (Harris 2022b; Oulebsir-Oukil 2023). As such, the Kabyle nation is unjustly deprived of a full collective conscience and thus of national sovereignty and power (Anderson 2006; Oulebsir-Oukil 2023).

Conceived in these terms, *Kabylité* is the awareness of this subjectivity and its nationalist narratives, framed as a reclamation of its cultural consciousness for greater political sovereignty in Algeria (Harris 2022b). This is expressed by outwardly fostering a presumed authentic culture: performing dance and music, exhibiting Kabyle aesthetics, disseminating knowledge through association activity, speaking Tamazight and using the language in lieu of Arabic to reclaim culturally contested referents (Harris 2022b). Arabic *couscous*—whose Algerian variant traditionally comprises fine semolina grains topped by a hearty stew, chickpeas, and beef or lamb meat—is instead Tamazight *seksu*, Arabic *kesra*—a round semolina flatbread often served with olive oil or *ifelfel* pepper sauce—is *aghrum*, and so on. Additionally, this expression exists alongside the propagation of overtly political ideologies: pro-democracy, Kabyle regional autonomy, secularism, and an ascriptive feminism. The latter’s conception, as delineated by popular narratives, valorizes the role of the woman, the mother, and the grandmother in embodying and propagating *Kabylité*. Women are demonstrate the collective virtues of family loyalty, austerity and perseverance through her character and labor: donning traditional attire and tattoos, performing traditional song and dance, producing art and literature, imparting knowledge through language, and cooking traditional meals—which all operate oppositional to a figured subjugation of Arab Muslim women (Sabatier 2008; Béji-Bécheur, Ourahmoune, and Özçağlar-Toulouse 2014; Ammouden 2018; Harris 2022).

These positionalities derive from the politics Algerian Kabyles—as victims of rampant political corruption, cultural suppression, and endemic poverty—maintain in the historic struggle for national sovereignty; adopting these positionalities internationally thus expatriates and distances them from their sociopolitical condition, and necessarily conflates its material plights as abstract and ideological (Collyer 2008; Harris 2022b). This metamorphosis also shifts the rhetorical and historiographical narratives of these politics; for example, I suggest that geographer Johnathan Harris's (2022a; 2022b) work among Franco-Kabyle political and associative entities uncritically reflects an over-emphasis on scholar-activists in defining the diaspora's presence to the contributions of working-class and refugee Kabyles.

Moreover in France, instead of positioning the Kabyle as underdogs in a fight for national sovereignty as in Algeria, the functional oppositionality embedded in its rhetoric rather contributes to the harmful racial logic of the Kabyle myth, whose hegemonic operation along lines of prejudice favor the Kabyle at the expense of Arab Algerians and a larger *beur* solidarity (Collyer 2008; Hadj-Belgacem 2018b; Harris 2022b). Early in my fieldwork, I became a regular at *La Fa Brick*, a hole-in-the-wall Algerian street-food restaurant just north of Barbès co-owned and run by a Franco-Kabyle mother-daughter team, each manning the store alone on alternating shifts throughout my research. During one visit with its matriarchal owner, she spoke to me about the degradation of *Kabylité* in the local community—one she called home; "*Ici, il y a trop de monde. Nous sommes [...] avec des Arabes. Même ici, les panneaux sont en arabe: égyptiens!*" ["Here, there's too much of everybody. We're together with Arabs. Even here (in the restaurant) the poster prints are in Arabic: Egyptian!"]

Not dissimilarly, over the course of my interview with a retired white bourgeoisie—whose trust I had earned through her resident exchange-student—at her bohemian residence in the southwestern 16th arrondissement, she venerated the Kabyle, empathizing with us as a fellow (Basque) Montagnard and glad that "*des jeunes commencent à réaliser que les Kabyles ne sont pas forcément Musulmans*" ["young

people are starting to realize that Kabyles aren't necessarily Arab"] in a context where "the term '*algérien*' has—" she corrects, "had a bad reputation." This baggage is difficult to even unpack transparently in the language of the French racial schema; the discourse of colorblindness in French Republican nationality obfuscates its racial poles of power, mirroring the country's cosmopolitan population without acknowledging the fact or cause of its diversity (Beaman 2019). Its rhetoric of national equality denies any institutionally sanctioned lens through which to process this Franco-*Kabylité* as a byproduct of the Kabyle myth, nor formulate a new French-ethnic consciousness that moves beyond it (Beaman 2017; 2019). Extending the politics of a nationalist in-group *Kabylité* from Algerian socio-history inadvertently runs alongside a disparate French abstraction of *Kabylité* rooted in imperial-age logics of racism (Harris 2022b; Sayad 1994). However, even in acknowledging its benefit to Franco-Kabyles, the supposition of French *Kabylité* is still a hegemonizing and exploitative force, mapping an othering system of knowledge and value on a population often unwitting in their complicity.

In defining *Kabylité*, the unacknowledgeable marginality of the Franco-Kabyle identity can be variously manipulated, associated and dissociated relationally to perceived forms of Frenchness and Algerianness—the cue ball in a game of power amongst abstracted mythological, political, and racist narratives. Thus, I reassert that there is no definition of *Kabylité* that is universal or extricable. I posit that *Kabylité* is defined instead by its transitivity, realized contextually through the intent and use of overarching knowledge systems, glimpsed in the lived expressions and projections that hail it.

### How do Franco-Kabyles directly navigate and negotiate Franco-Kabylité?

Though Franco-*Kabylité* emerges partially as the contest between abstracted, superimposing knowledges, I importantly discern that individual Franco-Kabyles exist as the *friction*, not the embodiment, of these influences. Identity is rather consciously mediated through negotiations—as the interrogative micro-level

counterpoint to macro-level articulation—of Franco-*Kabylité*, a conduit through which to reclaim agency and position oneself in relation to it (Harris 2022b). This process often occurs through expressions of colloquially understood culture, which necessitates reconsidering what an authentic practice of Franco-*Kabylité* can look like; through ethnographic promenades in three of Paris' Franco-Kabyle sites, I aim to exhibit the discursivity of expression reflected in literally navigating its inhabited spaces.

I disembark the 2 line at the elevated Barbès-Rochechouart station, an infamous stop serving one of Paris' most infamous neighborhoods: Barbès. I file down the wrought-iron stairs and out the exit doors—holding them open, as others in front and behind me do, for people skimming the entry turnstiles—into the intersection of Boulevard de la Chapelle and Boulevard Barbès, ignoring the loitering cigarette dealers and their entrepreneurial promises of “*marques bleds*” [“brands from the homeland”]. I comingle in its cacophony—groups of dark-haired men and boys loiter and disperse from doorways and café terraces with the synchrony of clouds, engaged in multilingual conversations accented by the harsh glottals of Semitic inflections. Navigating its arterial boulevards demands contesting a spatial anarchy: weaving between exchanges held in passing across sidewalks and terraces, around trucks and traffic, away from passing scooters and motorbikes, and out unflinchingly onto the street. At this corner, directly north across from the metro's exit, is the incongruously bohemian and moderately overpriced Brasserie Barbès, around which the crowds pass like ships in the night; I do not remember it being here the last time I visited. Walking along Boulevard de la Chapelle, the neighborhood's southern commercial heart proves more familiar: Algerian street food shops and bakeries, groceries, halal butcheries, cafés, clothes shops and tailors, hashish joints, and telecommunications stores advertising money-transfer services alongside new and refurbished iPhones—all in the shadow of what once was the lauded Tunisian-founded Tati department store, shuttered during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Along this very street, I recognize a cinemographic shot from the music video for *Barbès*, a bilingual ode to the neighborhood by

the Franco-Kabyle new-wave musician Rachid Taha in an acoustic fusion of rock and rai.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays, around 400 meters of the boulevard's median—above which runs the section of metro rail I had arrived on—is transformed into an open-air market, flanked by a gallery of stalls selling fresh meat, fish, produce, artisanal goods, and clothes for which prices per kilogram or liter are scrawled on hung chalkboards. Cries of “*cousin.e!*” and “*allez, venez!*” [“come, come!”] ring out over the bustling market, sales transactions held in spontaneous pidgins finalized and emphasized to flaunt their bargains—muffled occasionally by the soft rumble of a train passing overhead. Its transactional exchanges are additionally carried intimately through hands: vendors wave to market their selections to the crowd, customers converse the process of selection through touch and gesture, chosen bulk is delicately weighed on hand scales, money in bills and change pass directly from palm to palm. Parisians of all sorts—young and old, men and women, Maghrebi, African, Asian, and white alike—wade the market and sample the products, in search of its characteristically ‘other’ ‘*marque Barbès*’ (Lallement 1998, 70).

Traversing north through Barbès and into Goutte d'Or, the density of its winding streets thins, though never completely. Shops and enterprises à ‘*Orientale*’ line ground-floor real estate below curtains billowing from open windows. From some streets, the shops frame the Sacré-Coeur basilica on top of Montmartre hill, the contrast of its tourist-addled bohemian lushness just one kilometer away. Along these streets, however, local patrimony is not as guaranteed; I pass under a message blocked in paint on a building façade, “*MADAME LA MINISTRE DE LA CULTURE/PROTEGEZ LE THEATRE* [sic]” [“TO THE MINISTER OF CULTURE/ PROTECT THE THEATRE”], a plea to the government to restore Barbès' Cinema Luxor, a deteriorating icon of Paris' Art Nouveau architecture. I stop in at *La Fa Brück* for one of my habitual visits, its floor-to-ceiling windows illuminating the colorful menagerie of mid-century Arabic movie posters and Kabyle tapestries adorning the walls surrounding either mother or daughter—always sporting a colorful *amendil* [foulard] and wearing a

traditional Kabyle dress under her apron, people-watching while hard at work baking. She smiles as I step in; I take my normal order, "*Aghrum vousoufer aux épinards, txil-ik*" ["Spinach-stuffed aghrum, please"], for three euros, and she asks how my studies are coming along, how I like Paris, about family while we wait. Our conversations, though brief, are meaningful to me. We exchange goodbyes, "*Ar-tufat!*" and as I leave, she waves.

Aghrum in hand, I pause along a walled bridge that would overlook tracks extending from the nearby Gare du Nord train terminus. The entirety of the wall's length is tagged, replete with works whose artists I could not at-a-glance identify in the rest of the city. One, however, stands out to me: written in a simple script, "*Octobre 1961...2020/Union pour l'Algérie*" ["October 1961...2020/Union for Algeria"]. Two Octobers, sixty years apart: the first homage to the massacre of October 17th wherein, protesting an institutional encroachment of liberty in the vestiges of the Algerian War of Independence, many of the thousands of demonstrating Franco-Algerians were arrested, brutalized, and killed at the hands of Parisian gendarmes; the second being the final month of the national Hirak peaceful protest movement in Algeria, which sought constitutional reform against the corrupt regime of five-time incumbent president and vocal Berber oppositionist Abdelaziz Bouteflika (Thil and Moulin 2023, Zerrouky 2020). Two dates, within living memory for many people, that document the transnational strife of Algerians for dignity and justice, many among them Kabyles. But why documented here? Though shifting migration patterns have brought increasing Maghrebi and African diversity to Barbès, it retains a Franco-Kabyle/Algerian disposition through the fluid character of its establishments, use of language, and patterns of movement and conglomeration in space (Hamid 2022; Lallement 1998). The particularities of this disposition engender one landscape against which people embody, reference, and contest various Franco-Kabylités.

Only ten minutes east along the 2 line from Barbès-Rochechouart is Belleville in the twentieth arrondissement, a neighborhood that, though not as reputed as Barbès, has its own Kabyle presence. Historically linked with

the movement of Sephardic Jews in the early-mid twentieth century, it now hosts a diversity of other populations. Emerging onto the bustling Boulevard de Belleville, I notice the scent of halal African fusion in the air, jabs between employees in a Guadalupian grocery closing up shop, young punks sat at terrasses of communist and anarchist cafés, signs in Chinese and Vietnamese contesting for legibility against voraciously tagged façades. One, scrawled along the back of a street sign, reads simply "Algiria [sic]."

Situated humbly in a meagre storefront on one of many lonely residential detours is the *Association culturelle berbère*, the ACB, one of the city's older eminent associations, founded in 1979 and distinctly of its era (Harris 2022a). Posters affixed against its vitrines detail the scope and schedule of its services: language, music, and dance classes, exhibitions and seminars in its dedicated downstairs performance space, panels of invited authors and artists, bureaucratic and legal aide services, and after-school hours. In the small foyer beyond, framed newspapers from both sides of the Mediterranean collage transnational stories of Kabyle accomplishment and adversity—from reporting on Algeria's civil war to laudous celebrations of Zinedine Zidane's 1998 World Cup win—set on a wall tiled in Kabyle aesthetic tradition. Just down the street lies another self-evidently Kabyle enterprise, *le Cantine des Hommes libres* [The Free People's Canteen], who's symbolic yaz illuminated on its sign winks at me from across the road; I stop in, tracing more posters of performances and exhibitions crowding the valuable window space.

Regardless of its homages outside, the canteen is emblematic of the traditional Parisian *brasserie*: dim yellow lighting accentuates the rich hardwood finish of the bar and cabinetry, subtly styled in French art nouveau, cracked black leather barstools sprout from linoleum floors, various alcohols sit available on tap or among crystal glassware in displays, the week's "*plats de bled*" ["specials from the homeland"] scrawled on a hanging chalkboard, the air hangs still in repose. The bartender chats with the kitchen staff and the middle-aged clientele—equal parts men and women, in groups or alone—rub shoulders in Tamazight and French, soft in conjunction with the ambience of Edith

Piaf or Kabyle guitar. Le Cantine des Hommes libres—translated idiomatically from the Tamazight *Imazghren*, the plural of Amazigh—is one of the last of Belleville’s Kabyle brasseries, an institutional model of diasporic enterprise emergent from the earliest days of Franco-Kabyle expatriation. However, its space does not evoke the pretense of *Kabylité* as a stark other—its mediation rather occurs non-consumptively, its fluidity more viscous (Steiner 1999; Béji-Bécheur, Ourahmoune, and Özçağlar-Toulouse 2014; Hamid 2022).

On April 20, 2024, Place de Ménilmontant—only three blocks away from the ACB and the brasserie—was officially renamed by the government of Paris to Square Idir in honor of the legacy of the nominal Idir, pseudonym of late Franco-Kabyle singer-poet Hamid Cheriet. A contemporary of Matoub Lounès, Idir had settled in Paris at Ménilmontant, a small neighborhood immediately south of Belleville, where he produced music and worked extensively with ACB in his transnational political activism (Sadouni 2017). At the inauguration ceremony, Éric Pliez, mayor of the twentieth arrondissement, expressed, “*je crois qu’il correspond à notre arrondissement ce transnationalité, une arrondissement multiculturelle... et pour cette arrondissement, c’est une fierté d’avoir créé cette place aujourd’hui*” [“I believe that he corresponds with this transnationality, the multiculturalism of our arrondissement... and for [us], it’s an honor to have created this square today.”]

Beyond the contours of strictly physical space, the internet provides a shared medium within which Franco-Kabyles mediate and disseminate cultural knowledge. The diversity of *Kabylités* negotiated within and beyond Paris’ diasporic communities communes through a multipolar mediascape, in expression and documentary. Village or community-based groups on Facebook share material—textpost updates on village and community life, photos of spaces and events, videos of performances, and so on—that reinforce nationalist narratives of both its particularities and a broader *Kabylité*. Content created for Tamazight language propagation exists across numerous platforms, to varying degrees of didactic utility (Lafkioui 2013). Kabyle activists, artists, and artisans freely share their works and the

perspectives that engender them amongst international audiences on Instagram and Twitter. BerbèreTV, a French-based news broadcast network founded in 2000, uploads daily video segments to YouTube in Tamazight and French, reporting from Kabylia and across its diasporas in France, Europe, and beyond (Hamid 2022). The possibilities of online infrastructure extend the means through which negotiating *Kabylité* can be perceived and mediated expressively (Lafkioui 2013).

Moreover, the popular use and accessibility of social media foster novel ways for young Franco-Kabyles to engage and map Franco-*Kabylité*. Another stage in the evolution of Kabyle associations, online associations—as either an influential digital extension of a local institution or entirely virtual endeavors—leverage cultural community to cultivate audiences across social media platforms. More than their precursors, online associations actualize through congregating along networks of Franco-Kabyle influencers, hosting popular figures to produce content. Interestingly, this materializes not infrequently through hosting local soirees. Early October—a joint festival and fundraiser set up by a group of Paris-based artists, *la Nuit étoilée* [the starry night] was hosted in and as a collaboration with Les Amarres, an indie-chic event venue in the thirteenth arrondissement overlooking the promenades along the eastern Seine.

In typical fashion, the event started at 18:00 but did not get underway until much later, the initial trickle growing into a lively bustle as hours passed. Along a central atrium lined fairy lights above displays from featured visual artists—including millennial first-generation feminist and print artist Sarah Hand, whose Instagram account @berberewoman had led me here—below an elevated platform upon which rested the venue’s refreshment window, some lined bar seating, and a small stage with insufficient standing area; a multi-story glass façade separated the interior from exterior balcony seating, the open and amicable ambiance of the arrangement matching the brilliant winks of outer Paris’ contemporary skyline. As the crowd materialized, the invited setlist rotated the stage, producing club sound and samples with raï mixes and guitar. Most of the crowd appeared to be younger adults,

perhaps in their twenties or thirties, contributing to the vociferous atmosphere of *la Nuit*. Escaping to the balcony for a reprieve from the volume inside, casual conversation crowds the tables, coalescing yet fluid like the drinks many tended to. I am caught in a conversation between a man and woman leaning on the balcony railing: the brother of the event's principal organizer, a fashion photographer, and their guest, a non-Kabyle visitor from Vancouver. I am clocked as Kabyle by the former, introduced as such, "...also [coming] from Algeria," to the latter, and we chat over shared drinks. It is a spontaneous, infinitesimal interaction—that ends with me getting a note to the host's online garment shop—but a connection nonetheless.

When I leave, well past nightfall, the festival still roars behind me. Les Amarres has since collaborated with other actors for other diaspora events, and more still are arranged by other online associations: Kif-Kif Bledi, a dance company with a strong social media arm, ran a three-day cultural exposition in Paris in March 2024, and DayZ, an online collective for diasporic Algerians in general, organizes semiannual group return trips to Algeria. Moreover, as networks of online associations and Franco-Kabyle influencers gain cohesion, it becomes refracted in the repertoire of older institutions: one of many round-tables I attended hosted by the ACB concerned the impact and feminism of @berberewoman's work.

The internet transgresses physical boundaries to facilitate participation in its expressive spaces; it is how I, along with many others, maintain connections to otherwise inaccessible fields of Franco-Kabylité—and stave off feeling *hors place*. Notably, as the limits of its language support necessitate exchanges in French, Arabic, English, or a variety of graphemically diverse romanized Tamazight, its infrastructure functionally embodies transnationality within the diaspora. The vivacity of these online netscapes, regardless of age, social, and national borders, supposes a multiplicity of ever-evolving Kabylités reinforced by the diversity inherent among its multimodal discourses (Lafkioui 2013).

Expressing identity within these sites occurs through how people can or choose to directly engage them—the friction between the particular Franco-Kabylités embedded in space mediated by how individuals see themselves within it (Beaman 2017; Silverstein 2004). The range of conscious expressions that arise from busy streets, quiet brasseries, or bumping soirees thus collectively reflects valid negotiations of Franco-Kabylité, motivated by patterns of navigation.

### How do Franco-Kabyle relationships negotiate and extend Franco-Kabylité?

However, individuals do not Pollock these canvases individually. Negotiation is more expressly realized in myriad personal exchanges that engage or interrogate Franco-Kabyle particularities — after all, no singular identity can alone rectify the total range of realized Franco-Kabylités. On the contrary, the processes of identity formation are collaborative; dialogue that demonstrates and acknowledges this discursivity becomes the medium by which we can posit our own. My relationships with other Franco-Kabyles reaffirm my identity, steeped in difference though it is. I contend that any unifying character of the Franco-Kabyle diaspora is ironically constituted by its diversity and how connection arises within it.

Sitting in the plaza of a public park during my final week in Paris, reminded of my father's stifling Kabylité I would soon have to confront, I could only mull over the following: how can I reconcile the hardships my family went through with my disconnection from their experiences in defining my own identity? The question reflected a feeling of inadequacy, the failure to meaningfully understand or channel my Kabyle heritage, and whether that invalidated any negotiated hyphenated Kabyle self-identification. Though the intricacies of the question are mine alone, the underlying sentiment of disconnect is familiarly evident in negotiations of Franco-Kabylité among its second generation. When prompted during one of our many conversations about "real" Kabyles at *La Fa Brick*, its filial owner refused to ascribe validity to her Kabylité, despite possessing what I presumed to be near-native fluency: "*Ma*

*mère, oui—elle est une vraie Kabyle. Mais moi, je ne suis pas*” [My mother, yes—she’s a real Kabyle. But me, I’m not”].

After our initial encounter at the ACB, S and I arranged subsequent meetings at a small bistro overlooking Place Gambetta, further south in the twentieth arrondissement, where we sat down and quizzed each other for hours; when asked if she felt as if she had “found her place” anywhere, she responded that, “*je me suis jamais reconnue ni en France ni en Algérie [...] en Kabylie, ça serait pas chez moi, quoi; il y aura un truc où même si j’avais la langue, je ne me verrais pas du tout légitime* [sic]” [I’ve never really recognized myself in France or in Algeria [...] in Kabylia, that wouldn’t be home for me either; there’d be a thing where even if I spoke the language, I wouldn’t see myself as belonging.”] I realize that this affiliative tension arises from a perceived inability to fluidly navigate the friction of Franco-Kabylité, a condition Franco-Kabyle sociologist Abdemalik Sayad (1994), as a companion to W. E. B. Du Bois’ double consciousness, coined as double *absence*: a sense of alienation both in France and from Kabylia, embodying too much of one for the other (see also Harris 2022b). Though originally identified in reference to the isolation felt by first-generation Franco-Kabyles in the twentieth century, its particular legacy is universalized in the broader struggles of estrangement across its diaspora.

Late October—I am drawn once again to the ACB, this time to follow a panel with the artist of their current exposition, “*entre Montagne, Peuple, et terre (Terre)*” [“between Mountain, People, and earth (Country)]: a journey into the heart of pastoral Kabylia through its quotidian ephemera, documented through filmmaking and photography. One of the association’s classrooms has been vacated and turned into an art gallery, prints of photos delicately displayed on its walls, punctuated by the poetic reflections of their documentarian; one in particular—of a man posed in front of a traditional olive oil press, a craft the placard denotes that he, the photographer’s old primary school instructor, pursues in retirement—calls to the recollections of my own ancestral village, the slick grinding of machines worked by kin at the top of our mountainous olive groves. An accompanying video

documentary plays on a mounted TV in the corner, a voice-over in subtitles narrating the snapshots of rural practice that dance around the room.

The exhibit transfixes me, losing myself for several long minutes until the audience is summoned downstairs for the start of the panel. I, huddled alongside a group who had been politely parlaying in the lobby, shuffled downstairs and sat; I chose consciously to sit in a lonely seat, positioned in the back corner by the door—I tell myself it was to get unobtrusive video footage, but its distance is more than incidental. Among the panelists conversing onstage was the invited documentarian, ‘Ly,’ a young twenty-something wearing jeans, Converse shoes, and a sweater, mousy black hair and a small Kabyle ‘fly’ face tattoo on their right cheek, their reservation on stage unable to mask the radiant jubilation of their presence. Over the panel’s hour and thirty minutes, Ly relayed the role of their oeuvre as a personal conduit; far more than a nationalist vindication of rural Kabylia, the journey it documented was reconciliatory, a videographic mediation of the complicated relationship they held to their native landscape—a relationship they discovered still held love for its nature and the practices it holds.

Ly described how that appreciation and the values that it inspires are what inspire them in turn, elucidating a newfound acceptance of their Kabyle origins. Adrift in this narrative, I see myself vividly in Ly: in the experiences of estrangement in what should have been home, their identity as non-binary, the work of identarian reconciliation—what else is this ethnography? I realize that in attendance at this exposition, the audience, with hooked noses, curly hair, and olive skin like my own, is equally capable of engaging and understanding its narrative. I am moved almost to tears by the conscious revelation that I am in a room of people who are *like me*. After the panel, crowded upstairs in the exhibition room, I catch Ly; I tell them about my research and confess my affinity for their work. They reciprocate and we exchange contact information, inviting me for a chat whenever I feel.

November—I have taken them up on their offer, embarking by train to their campus at the

University of Paris-Saclay, southwest of the city in Orsay. The trip, comprising multiple train changes, unanticipated delays, and wind chills in the negatives of degrees, has exhausted me long before we meet; still, in the controlled chaos of their studio lab surrounded by countless potted plants and sticky notes, sitting across from each other, I am reinvigorated by the growing comity of our interview. They elaborate on their journey of reconciliation: they emigrated from Kabylia in 2017 to pursue higher education and were neither compelled nor able to return until December 2022. In Algeria, they felt *hors place*, consciously choosing to reject “traditional” cultural influences and its imposed closed-mindedness—initially in favor of France until they migrated and again felt alien, “*chez moi nulle part*” [“home nowhere”]; this sparked a period of profound reflection from which they were able to consciously untangle their affiliative attachments to Kabylia and cultivate their *Kabylité*. Ly’s process of disidentification, familiar among queer French-Maghrebis, is central to their self-definition (Provencher 2017). They do not define themselves existentially as Kabyle and, though they align with Kabylia, feel discomfort in conflating attachment with identity:

I say without hesitation that I come from Kabylia, but [...] I still feel this heaviness in my chest when I say that because there are things that I do not support still going on in Algeria, so it’s complicated. [...] When I say that I’m Kabyle and from Algeria, and just that—not prefacing anything else—it’s like I support what’s going on over there; that doesn’t sit with me, right?

As the interview wound through the night, we strayed from keeping it ‘one-sided,’ instead letting its questions elevate our mutual experiences and insights. They detailed their apprehension about the potential for closed-mindedness in Franco-Kabyle relationships, a sentiment that I intimately knew and felt had prevented me from engaging with the broader community to the extent I had wanted.

We commiserated on the strain that simply being ourselves had on our kin relationships—during their time in Algeria, they had gone out

of their way to spend as little time with their parents as possible: “...*déjà vers un demi-jour j’ai commencé dire ‘Ah ouais, heureusement que je bientôt partir!’ [sic]*” [Half a day in and I already started saying ‘Okay, thankfully I’m leaving soon!'] We derailed on the struggles of encultured gender performance, the nature of our documentary methodologies, the realities and consequences of negotiating *Kabylité*; the interrogative format of our interview had morphed from a simple analytical tool into a collaborative conduit through which we shared and compared our experiences and formed a bond. By the end of the night, saying our goodbyes on the platform I had come in on, we had made a thousand different promises to keep in touch, to see each other again, to plan a trip to Kabylia together someday, each flush with a deeply held sincerity.

However, one line amidst our banter stands out as being more profoundly implicative. They recollected how after their panel, “*Tous les gens sont revenus vers moi [...] pour me dire, ‘Oui, j’ai ressenti ça aussi quand j’étais là-bas.’ [...] c’est vraiment trop chouette, je me suis senti.e vraiment, pour une fois, compris.e, en fait*” [“Everybody [in the audience] came up to me to say, ‘Yeah, I felt that too when I was there.’ It was really very cool, I really felt understood, actually.”] Much like for me, Ly’s act of publicly interrogating their *Kabylité* and acknowledging its heavy emotional toll had bonded the audience within the ephemeral site of the exposition; I note how we afterwards commingled, animated in independent mediations buttressed by “When you were back...,” “Did you ever...?,” “Thank you for saying that...” Within these diasporic spaces, the isolation of estrangement is transgressed through an acknowledgement of its presence, visible displays negotiating Franco-*Kabylité* provoke constructive exchanges of personal knowledge that constitute its discursive identities. To this end, Ly is not alone; works and directors from across diasporas—though Franco-Kabyles more prolifically—have contributed their voices to an emergent Kabyle film scene, spanning a vast corpus of auto/ethnographically salient works that explore Kabyle subjectivities and relationships. These films screen at associations and film festivals, each garnering audiences who see themselves

in the stories told and contribute to a conversation. Franco-*Kabylité* is neither static nor inherent in a person; it breathes, a product of engaging lived experience and malleable and responsive to negotiatory input.

Leaving for France to conduct my ethnography—the first time I had gone in six years—I was nervous about the perceived validity of my Franco-*Kabylité* and its potential impact on the salience of my research, especially as a queer, neurodivergent, American and non-speaking Franco-Kabyle; instead, I found solidarity in the creative, queer, mixed, and uncertain Franco-Kabyles I acquainted myself with. The introspective interactions I had with these people not only informed me of their Franco-Kabyle identities but also gave me the understanding to process my own. Having immigrated to and grown up in the United States as *moitié-moitié* [mixed, literally “half-half”], I realize an unmistakably American Franco-Kabylité: I eat *seksu* and *aghrum* alongside breakfast cereal, learn shaky Tamazight with English translations, wear cowboy hats with Algerian club jerseys. However, like so many others, I still feel *hors place* in what should be home, disenfranchised from vocalizing my identity since the language that expresses it does not exist in English—“*Kabylité*” is a French word. Nor do I feel any less estranged in France or Kabylia; I rather anchor my affiliations to being *hors place*, this neither-intersection-nor-absence of cultural identities that both define my lived marginality and liberate its assignment. I feel resolute here—like Taos Amrouche, I find no satisfaction beyond negotiation.

## Conclusion

Frequently, when meeting or hearing about other Kabyles in out-of-the-way, unexpected locales, someone will inevitably affirm that “*nous sommes partout*” [“we are everywhere.”] Though far from hyperbolic, I believe the underlying sentiment extends beyond just geographic space; Franco-*Kabylité* and the diasporic identities that collaboratively constitute it exist diffusely across its contexts. The Franco-Kabyle, though subject to the overarching sociohistorical and nationalist

influences that their presence is steeped in, rather define and express their identities by critically and individually negotiating their various narratives: encompassing discourses on language, politics, race, place, enterprise, character, and belonging. These negotiations occur across the diaspora’s multipolar landscapes, communing with frictional articulations of Franco-Kabylité, other individual Franco-Kabyles, and institutions of Paris to realize thoroughly discursive identities. “*Nous sommes partout*” recognizes and reaches across this diversity, uniting Franco-Kabyles through our differences.

After our first interview at the bistro at Place Gambetta, an occasion that had stretched well into the afternoon, S and I exchanged cordial thank-you’s over WhatsApp as our metro cars sailed away in opposite directions. In one sentence, otherwise a blithe acknowledgement of the intensity of our conversation, she made an axiom of our lived Kabylité: “...” et pourtant notre experience est assez différente, c’est marrante, le metissage c’est la galère partout” [...] and even if our experience is pretty different, it’s funny, being mixed universally sucks.”]

## Acknowledgements

I would like to firstly thank my undergraduate professors and academic supervisors, PhDs Melissa Johnson and Naomi Reed, for their consultative direction in the drafting and revision of this paper, and for opening the doors of anthropology for me; this paper would not exist without your dogged encouragement and support—not in the least because you were the first to invite me to submit my project for publication.

I also want to thank Karen McGarry and Aleem Mohammed at the Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography for giving me a chance and for their endless patience as I navigated the publication process.

Of course, I want to thank my cohort, friends, and family who have and always will support me; thank you for making me laugh when we're together and cry when we're apart.

*U taggara—tannemirt-ik, ababa.*

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