



# Conclusion, Albert Camus

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This text will conclude my survey of conditions in Kabylia, and I would like to make sure that it will serve well the cause of the Kabyle people—the only cause it was intended to serve. I have nothing more to say about the misery of Kabylia or about its causes and cures. I would have preferred to end with what I have already written, without adding useless words to a set of facts that should be able to speak for themselves. But preferable though it might have been to say nothing, the misery of the Kabyles was so awful that it had to be talked about. And for the same reason, these essays might fail to achieve their purpose if I did not dispose of certain facile criticisms by way of conclusion.

I will not mince words. These days, it seems that one is not a good Frenchman if one speaks of the misery of a French territory. I must say that it is hard to know nowadays what one must do to be a good Frenchman. So many people, of so many different kinds, boast of this title, and among them there are so many mediocre minds and self-promoters, that one can easily go wrong. Still, it is possible to know what it means to be a just person. And my prejudice is that France is best represented and defended by acts of justice.

Some will object, “Be careful, foreigners will use what you say.” But those who might use what I say are already guilty in the eyes of the world of cynicism and cruelty. And if France can be defended against them, it will be done not only with cannons but also with the freedom

that we still possess to say what we think and to do our modest part to repair injustice.

My role, moreover, is not to point a misleading finger of blame. I have no liking for the prosecutorial role. And even if I did like that role, many things would prevent me from filling it. I am only too well aware of the distress that the economic crisis has brought to Kabylia to level absurd charges at some of its victims. But I am also too well aware that many generous initiatives have met with resistance, even those backed by the highest authorities. And I am aware, finally, of the way in which the best of intentions can be distorted when applied in practice.

What I have tried to say is that, despite what people have wanted to do and have done for Kabylia, their efforts have addressed only small pieces of the problem while leaving the heart of the matter untouched. I write these words not for a party but for human beings. And if I wanted to describe the results of my investigation, I would say that the point is not to say to people “Look at what you have done to Kabylia” but rather “Look at what you have not done for Kabylia.”

Against charity, limited experiments, good intentions, and idle words, weigh in the balance famine and filth, loneliness and despair, and you will see whether the former outweigh the latter. If by some miracle the 600 deputies of France could travel the same itinerary of hopelessness that I did, the Kabyle cause would take a great leap forward. Indeed, there is always progress when a political problem is replaced by a human problem. If a lucid, focused policy is formulated to attack Kabyle poverty and bring the region back to life, then we will be the first to praise an effort of which we cannot be proud today.

I cannot refrain from saying one last word about the region I have just visited. This will be my real conclusion. Of long days poisoned by horrifying sights in the midst of an incomparable natural environment, what I remember is not just the desperate hours but also certain nights when I thought I had achieved a profound understanding of this country and its people.

I recall, for instance, one night, in front of the Zaouïa of Koukou,<sup>1</sup> a few of us were wandering in a cemetery of gray stones and contemplating the night as it fell across the valley. At that hour, no longer day but not yet night, I was aware of no difference between me and the others who had sought refuge there in search of a part of themselves. But I had no choice but to become aware of that difference a few hours later, when everyone should have sat down to eat.

It was there that I discovered the meaning of my investigation. If there is any conceivable excuse for the colonial conquest, it has to lie in helping the conquered peoples to retain their distinctive personality. And if we French have any duty here, it is to allow one of the proudest and most humane peoples in this world to keep faith with itself and its destiny.

I do not think I am mistaken when I say that the destiny of this people is to work and to contemplate, and in so doing to teach lessons in wisdom to the anxious conquerors that we French have become. Let us learn, at least, to beg pardon for our feverish need of power, the natural bent of mediocre people, by taking upon ourselves the burdens and needs of a wiser people, so as to deliver it unto its profound grandeur.

1. Koukou was a Berber kingdom in northern Algeria. The Zaouïa was its general assembly.—Trans.

The End