



# The Misery of Kabylia, Albert Camus

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## The Misery of Kabylia

In early 1939, Kabylia suffered a cruel famine, whose causes and effects will be explored in this and subsequent articles. I was sent to the region as a reporter for *Alger républicain*, a daily newspaper that at the time had a Socialist and Radical coloration, and published these articles on June 5 and 15, 1939. The pieces were too long and detailed to reproduce here in their entirety, and I have cut overly general observations and sections on housing, welfare, crafts, and usury.

### 1 Destitution

Before attempting a broad overview of the misery in Kabylia and retracing the itinerary of famine that I have been following for many long days now, I want to say a few words about the economic causes of this misery. They can be summed up in one sentence: Kabylia is an overpopulated region that consumes more than it produces. These mountains enfold in their creases a teeming population, which in some villages, such as Djurdjura, attain a density of 247 inhabitants per square kilometer.

No country in Europe is this crowded. The mean density in France is 71 per square kilometer. Furthermore, the Kabyle people consume mainly cereals such as wheat, barley, and sorghum in the form of flatcakes or couscous, but the Kabyle soil does not support these crops. The region's cereal production meets only one-eighth of its consumption needs. The grain necessary for life must therefore be purchased on the open market. In a region with virtually no industry, this can be done only by supplying a surplus of complementary agricultural produce.

Kabylia is mainly a country of orchards, however. Its two main cash crops are figs and olives. In many places, barely enough figs are produced to meet local consumption needs. Olive production varies from year to year: sometimes there is a shortfall, at other times an

overabundance. How is the actual output to be kept in balance with the starving Kabyles' need for grain?

The Office of Wheat increased the price of that grain, and it had its reasons for doing so. But the price of figs and olives did not increase. The Kabyles, net importers of wheat, therefore paid the tribute of hunger to their splendid but harsh environment.

Like people in other poor, overpopulated regions of the world, the Kabyles responded to this difficult situation by emigrating. The facts are well-known. I will add only that the number of Kabyles living outside the region is estimated to be 40,000 to 50,000 and that in good times, the single district of Tizi-Ouzou was taking in as much as 40 million francs in remittances every month, while the commune of Fort-National received nearly a million a day. This enormous influx of capital, the product of Kabyle labor abroad, was enough to finance Kabylia's trade deficit in 1926. The region was then prosperous, and through tenacity and hard work the Kabyles managed to cope with poverty.

When the Depression came, however, the French labor market dried up. Kabyle workers were sent home. Immigration barriers were erected, and in 1935 a series of administrative orders complicated the procedures for entering France to the point where Kabyles felt imprisoned in their mountainous redoubt. Emigration was effectively blocked by requiring a payment of 165 francs for "repatriation fees" along with countless other administrative hurdles, as well as the unusual requirement that every would-be émigré pay any back taxes owed by compatriots with the same last name. To cite only one figure to illustrate the consequences of these new rules, the commune of Michelet received only one-tenth as much in remittances as it did during the period of prosperity.

This precipitous decline in income plunged the region into misery. Kabyle peasants could not afford to buy high-priced wheat with what they were able to earn by selling their own produce at low prices. They had previously purchased the food they needed, saving themselves from starvation by relying on the labor of their émigré sons. When that

source of income was taken away, they found themselves defenseless against hunger. What I saw was the result, and I want to describe the situation as economically as possible so that readers may experience for themselves its distress and absurdity.

According to an official report, 40 percent of Kabyle families are living today on less than 1,000 francs per year, which is to say, less than 100 francs per month. Think about what that means. According to the same report, only 5 percent of families have more than 500 francs per month. Given that the typical family in the region consists of five or six people, you begin to have some idea of the indescribable penury of the Kabyle peasantry. I believe I can state that at least 50 percent of the population lives on herbs and roots in between government handouts of grain.

In Bordj-Menaïel, for example, of the 27,000 Kabyles in the commune, 10,000 live in poverty, and only 1,000 eat a normal diet. At the grain distribution that took place on the day I arrived, I saw nearly 500 impoverished peasants patiently awaiting their turn to receive a few liters of wheat. On that same day I was shown the local miracle: an old woman, bent double, who weighed only 25 kilograms. Each indigent was given roughly 10 kilos of wheat. In Bordj-Menaïel, handouts occur at monthly intervals, but in other places they take place only once every three months. Now, a family of eight needs approximately 120 kilos of wheat for just one month's worth of bread. I was told that the indigents I saw had to make their 10 kilos last the entire month, supplementing their meager grain supply with roots and the stems of thistle, which the Kabyles, with bitter irony, call the "artichoke of the ass."

In the Tizi-Ouzou district, some women walk as much as 30 or 40 kilometers to receive similar handouts. Without the charity of a local pastor, these poor women would have had no place to spend the night.

There are other signs of desperate poverty as well. In the Tizi-Ouzou "tribe," for example, wheat has become a luxury good. The best families eat a mix of wheat and sorghum. Poor families have been

known to pay as much as 20 francs a quintal for wild acorns. The usual menu of a poor family in this tribe consists of a barleycake and a soup of thistle stems and mallow roots with a small amount of olive oil. But last year's olive harvest was small, so this year there is no oil. The diet is similar throughout Kabylia; not a single village is an exception to the rule.

Early one morning in Tizi-Ouzou, I saw children in rags fighting with dogs over some garbage. To my questions a Kabyle responded: "It's like that every morning." Another resident of the village explained that during the winter, the ill-fed and ill-housed people had come up with a way to keep warm and get some sleep. They formed a circle around a wood fire, moving about occasionally to avoid getting stiff. So the circle of bodies was in constant motion, creeping along the ground. But this expedient probably isn't enough to keep everyone alive, because the forest regulations prohibit these poor people from picking up twigs where they find them, and it is not uncommon for the authorities to punish offenders by seizing their only worldly possession, the crusty, emaciated ass they use to carry home their bundles of twigs.

In the Tizi-Ouzou area, moreover, things have gotten so bad that private charity had to step in. Every Wednesday, the subprefect pays out of his own pocket so that 50 young Kabyles can enjoy a meal of bouillon and bread. With that they can hold out until the next monthly grain distribution. The Soeurs Blanches (Sisters of Our Lady of North Africa) and Pastor Rolland also help out with these charitable dinners.

Some readers may be thinking, "But these are special cases.... It's the Depression, etc. And in any event the figures are meaningless." I confess that I cannot understand this way of looking at the matter. I concede that statistics are meaningless, but if I say that the resident of Azouza whom I went to see belonged to a family of 10 children of whom only 2 survived, I am not giving you statistics or abstract arguments but a stark and revealing fact. Nor do I need to mention the number of students in the schools around Fort-National who fainted from hunger.

It's enough to know that they did and that it will happen again if these poor wretches do not get help. It is enough to know that teachers in the school at Talam-Aïach saw their students come to class this past October completely naked and covered with lice, and that they gave them clothes and shaved their heads. It is enough to know that among the students who leave school at 11 A.M. because their village is so far away from the schoolhouse, only 1 out of 60 eats barleycakes, while the others lunch on an onion or a couple of figs.

When grain was distributed in Fort-National, I questioned a child who was carrying a small sack of barley on his back.

"How many days is that supposed to last?"

"Two weeks."

"How many people in your family?"

"Five."

"Is that all you have to eat?"

"Yes."

"You have no figs?"

"No."

"Do you have olive oil to put on your flatcakes?"

"No, we use water."

And with a suspicious look he proceeded on his way.

Is that not enough? When I look at my notes, I see twice as many equally revolting realities, and I despair of ever being able to convey them all. It must be done, however, and the whole truth must be told.

For now, I must end this survey of the suffering and hunger of an entire people. The reader will have seen, at least, that misery here is not just a word or a theme for meditation. It exists. It cries out in desperation. What have we done about it, and do we have the right to avert our eyes? I am not sure that anyone will understand. But I do know that after returning from a visit to the "tribe" of Tizi-Ouzou, I climbed with a Kabyle friend to the heights overlooking the town. From there we watched the night fall. And at that hour, when the shadows descending from the mountains across this splendid land can soften even the hardest of hearts, I knew that there was no peace for those who, on the other side of the valley, were gathering around a spoiled barleycake. I

also knew that while it would have been comforting to surrender to the startling grandeur of that night, the misery gathered around the glowing fires across the way placed the beauty of this world under a kind of ban.

“Let’s go down now, shall we?” my friend said.

One evening, while walking in the streets of Tizi-Ouzou after traveling around the region, I asked one of my companions if it “was like this everywhere.” His answer was that I would soon see worse. We then walked for quite some time around the native village, where faint light from the shops mingled with music, folk dancing, and indistinct chatter in the dark streets.

And in fact I did see worse.

I knew that thistle stems were a staple of the Kabyle diet, and I discovered that this was indeed the case everywhere. What I did not know, however, was that last year, five Kabyle children from the Abbo region died after eating poisonous roots. I knew that not enough grain was being distributed to keep the Kabyles alive. But I did not know that the distributions were actually causing them to die, or that last winter, four elderly women who had gone to Michelet to collect grain handouts froze to death in the snow on their way home to their remote douar (village).

Yet everything is as it was meant to be. In Adni, only 40 of 106 schoolchildren eat enough to stave off hunger. Nearly everyone in the village is unemployed, and grain distributions are rare. In the douars of the commune of Michelet, the number of unemployed per douar is estimated to be nearly 500. And in the poorest places, such as Akbils, Aït-Yahia, and Abi-Youcef, the unemployment rate is even higher. In the entire commune there are some 4,000 able-bodied workers without jobs. Thirty-five of the 110 students at the school in Azerou-Kollal eat only one meal a day. Four-fifths of the people in Maillot are said to be destitute, and grain is distributed there only once every three months.

In Ouadhias, there are 300 indigents in a population of 7,500, but in the Sidi-Aïch region, 60 percent of the people are indigent. In the village of El-Flay, above the center of Sidi-Aïch, some families go two or three days without eating. Most of the families in this village supplement their daily diet with roots and cakes of pine seed picked up from the forest floor. But when they dare to gather pinecones, they often run afoul of the law, because the rangers mercilessly enforce the regulations.

If this litany of horrors is not convincing, I will add that 2,000 of the 2,500 Kabyle residents of the El-Kseur commune are paupers. For their entire day's ration, agricultural workers carry with them a quarter of a barleycake and a small flask of olive oil. Families supplement their roots and herbs with nettles. If cooked for hours, this plant can complement the usual pauper's meal. The same is true in the douars around Azazga. The native villages in the vicinity of Dellys also number among the poorest in the region. In Beni-Sliem for instance, an incredible 96 percent of the population is indigent.

The harsh land there yields nothing. Residents are reduced to gathering fallen wood to burn for charcoal, which they then try to sell in Dellys. I say "try to sell" because they do not have vendor licenses, so that half the time their charcoal is seized along with the ass used to transport it. Villagers have therefore taken to sneaking into Dellys by night, but the rangers remain vigilant around the clock. When animals are seized, they are sent to the pound. The charcoal burner must then pay the pound fee in addition to a fine in order to retrieve his ass. If he cannot pay, he is arrested and sent to prison, where at least he can eat. So it is in that sense and that sense only that one can say without irony that the sale of charcoal feeds the people of Beni-Sliem.

What could I possibly add to facts such as these? Mark them well. Imagine the lives of hopelessness and desperation that lie behind them. If you find this normal, then say so. But if you find it repellent, take action. And if you find it unbelievable, then please, go and see for yourself.



What remedies have been proposed to alleviate such distress? Only one: charity. Grain is distributed, and with this grain and cash assistance so-called “charity workshops” have been created.

About the distributions of grain I will be brief. Experience has shown how absurd they are. A handout of 12 liters of grain every two or three months to families with four or five children is the equivalent of spitting in the ocean. Millions are spent every year, and those millions do no good. I do not think that charitable feelings are useless. But I do think that in some cases the results of charity are useless and that a constructive social policy would therefore be preferable.

Note, too, that the selection of beneficiaries of these handouts is usually left to the discretion of the local caïd (village chieftain) or municipal councilors, who are not necessarily impartial. Some say that the most recent general council elections in Tizi-Ouzou were bought with grain from the distributions. It is not my business to investigate whether or not this is true, but the mere fact that it is being said is itself a condemnation of the method of selection. In any case, I know for a fact that in Issers, grain was denied to indigents who voted for the Algerian People’s Party.

What is more, nearly everyone in Kabylia complains about the poor quality of the grain that is distributed. Some of it no doubt comes from our national surplus, but part of it is outdated grain disposed of by army warehouses. So that in Michelet, for example, the barley that was given out was so bitter that even the animals wouldn’t eat it, and some Kabyles told me with straight faces that they envied the horses of the gendarmerie, because they at least ate food that was inspected by a veterinarian.

To deal with unemployment, many communes have organized charity workshops, where indigents do useful work for which they are paid 8 to 10 francs a day, half in grain, half in cash. The communes of Fort-National, Michelet, Maillot, and Port-Gueydon, among others, have organized such workshops, which offer the advantage of preserving the dignity of the men receiving assistance. But they also have one

important drawback: in communes where all the grain available for assistance goes to the workshops, invalids who are unable to work receive no aid.

Furthermore, since the number of workshop jobs is limited, workers must be rotated, with priority for those who are able to work two days straight. In Tizi-Ouzou, workers are employed for 4 days out of every 40, for which they receive 20 liters of grain. Once again, the millions that are spent amount to spitting in the ocean.

Finally, I must say something about a practice that has become widespread but which should be the object of vigorous protest. In all communes except for Port-Gueydon, back taxes owed by indigents (because indigents are subject to taxation even though they cannot pay) are subtracted from the cash component of their wages. There are no words harsh enough to condemn such cruelty. If the charity workshops are meant to help people who are dying of hunger, there is a reason for their existence—an honorable reason, even if the results are risible. But if their effect is to make people work in order to die of hunger, whereas previously they died of hunger without working, then the workshops are nothing more than a despicable device for exploiting misery.

I do not want to end this portrait of penury without pointing out that it does not give the full measure of Kabylia's distress. To add insult to injury, winter follows summer every year. Right now, nature is treating these poor people relatively kindly. No one is cold. The donkey paths are still passable. Wild thistle can still be harvested for another two months. Roots are abundant. People can eat raw greens. What looks to us like extreme poverty is a blessed time for the Kabyle peasant. But once snow falls and blocks the roads and cold gnaws at malnourished bodies and makes rudimentary huts uninhabitable, a long winter of unspeakable suffering begins.

So before moving on to other aspects of wretched Kabylia's existence, I would like to dispose of certain arguments often heard in Algeria, arguments that use the supposed Kabyle "mentality" to excuse the

current situation. These arguments are beneath contempt. It is despicable, for example, to say that these people can adapt to anything. Mr. Albert Lebrun<sup>1</sup> himself, if he had to live on 200 francs a month, would adapt to living under bridges and surviving on garbage and crusts of bread. When it comes to clinging to life, there is something in man capable of overcoming the most abject miseries.

It is despicable to say that these people don't have the same needs we do. If they don't, then it is high time we showed them what they are missing. It is curious to note how the alleged qualities of a people are used to justify the debased condition in which they are kept, and how the proverbial sobriety of the Kabyle peasant lends legitimacy to his hunger. This is not the right way to look at things, and it is not the way we will look at things, because preconceived ideas and prejudices become odious when applied to a world in which people are freezing to death and children are reduced to foraging like animals even though they lack the instincts that would prevent them from eating things that will kill them. The truth is that we are living every day alongside people whose condition is that of the European peasantry of three centuries ago, and yet we, and we alone, are unmoved by their desperate plight.

1. The president of France from 1932 to 1940.—Trans.

## 2 Wages

People who are dying of hunger generally have only one way to survive: by working. I beg your pardon for stating such an obvious fact. But the present situation in Kabylia proves that knowledge of this fact is not as universal as it might seem. I said previously that half the Kabyle population is unemployed and three-quarters of the people are undernourished. This discrepancy is not the result of mistaken arithmetic. It simply proves that those who are not out of work still do not have enough to eat.

I had been alerted to the fact that wages in Kabylia were insufficient; I did not know that they were insulting. I had been told that the working

day exceeded the legal limit. I did not know that it was close to twice that long. I do not wish to be shrill, but I am obliged to say that the labor regime in Kabylia is one of slave labor, for I see no other word to describe a system in which workers toil for 10 to 12 hours per day for an average wage of 6 to 10 francs.

I will enumerate wage levels by region without further commentary. First, however, I want to say that although these figures might seem extraordinary, I can vouch for them. I am looking right now at the time cards of farmworkers on the Sabaté-Tracol estates in the region of Bordj-Menaïel. They bear the date of the current two-week pay period, the name of the worker, a serial number, and the nominal wage. On one card I see the figure 8 francs, on another 7, and on a third 6. In the time column, I see that the worker who earned 6 francs worked four days in the two-week period. Can the reader imagine what this means?

Even if the worker in question worked 25 days per month, he would earn only 150 francs, with which he would have to feed a family of several children for 30 days. Can anyone read this without feeling outrage? How many of you reading this article would be able to live on such a sum?

Before continuing with my narrative, let me state some facts. The wages I just mentioned are from the region of Bordj-Menaïel. I should add that the sirens at Tracol Farms sound during the high season (which is now) at 4 A.M., 11 A.M., 12 noon, and 7 P.M. That adds up to 14 hours of work. The communal workers in the village are paid 9 francs a day. After a protest by native municipal councilors, wages were increased to 10 francs. At Tabacoop, in the same region, the daily wage is 9 francs. In Tizi-Ouzou, the average wage is 7 francs for 12 hours of work. Employees of the commune get 12 francs.

Kabyle farmers in the region employ women to do weeding. For the same 12 hours of work, they are paid 3.5 francs. In Fort-National, Kabyle farmers are no more generous than their European counterparts, paying workers 6 to 7 francs a day. Women are paid 4

francs and given a flatcake as well. Communal employees receive 9 to 11 francs.

In the region of Djemaa-Saridj, where the soil is richer, men are paid 8 to 10 francs for 10 hours of work, and women get 5 francs. Around Michelet, the average farm wage is 5 francs plus food for 10 hours of work. The communal wage is 11 to 12 francs, but back taxes are withheld from the worker's pay without notice. The amount withheld is sometimes equal to the total wage. The average withholding is 20 francs per week.

In Ouadhias, the farm wage is 6 to 8 francs. Women get 3 to 5 francs for picking olives, while communal workers receive 10 to 11 francs less withholding for back taxes.

In the Maillot region, workers get 9 to 10 francs for an unlimited number of hours per day. For olive picking, the compensation has been set at 8 francs per quintal of olives harvested. A family of four can harvest an average of 2 quintals per day. The family therefore receives 4 francs per person.

In the Sidi-Aïch region, the wage is 6 francs plus a flatcake and figs. One local agricultural firm pays its workers 7 francs without food. Workers are also hired by the year for 1,000 francs plus food.

In the plain of El-Kseur, a colonized region, male workers are paid 10 francs, females 5 francs, and children who are employed to trim vines are paid 3 francs. Finally, in the region that stretches from Dellys to Port-Gueydon, the average wage is 6 to 10 francs for 12 hours of work. I will end this depressing list with two remarks. First, the workers have never rebelled against this mistreatment. Only in 1936, at Beni-Yenni, did workers involved in building a road, for which they were paid 5 francs per day, go on strike, winning a raise to 10 francs a day. Those workers were not unionized.

Second, I want to mention that the unjustifiable length of the working day is aggravated by the fact that the typical Kabyle worker lives a long way from where he works. Some must travel more than 10 kilometers round trip. After returning home at 10 at night, they must set out again for work at 3 in the morning after only a few hours of heavy sleep. You

may be wondering why they bother to go home at all. My answer is simply that they cling to the inconceivable ambition of spending a few quiet moments in a home that is their only joy in life as well as the object of all their concerns.

There are reasons for this state of affairs. The official estimate of the value of a day's labor service is 17 francs. If employers can pay a daily wage of only 6 francs, the reason is that widespread unemployment has put workers in competition with one another. Both settlers and Kabyle landowners are so aware of this that some administrators have been reluctant to increase communal wages in order to avoid angering these employers.

In Beni-Yenni, owing to circumstances about which I will say more in a moment, a program of public works was inaugurated. Unemployment decreased sharply, and workers were paid 22 francs a day. This proves that exploitation alone is the cause of low wages. None of the other reasons sometimes advanced to explain the status quo makes sense. Settlers allege that Kabyle workers often change jobs and that they therefore pay them "temporary" wages. But in Kabylia today, all wages are temporary, and this wretched excuse merely covers unpardonable self-interest.

Before concluding, I must say a word about the widespread idea that native labor is inferior to European labor. It is of course a product of the general contempt that settlers feel for the unfortunate natives of this country. As I see it, this contempt discredits those who profess it. I say that it is wrong to say that the productivity of Kabyle workers is inadequate, because if it were, the foremen who keep close watch on them would take it upon themselves to improve it.

Of course it is true that at some work sites one sees workers who are unsteady on their feet and incapable of lifting a shovel, but that is because they have not eaten. It is a perverse logic that says that a man is weak because he hasn't enough to eat and that therefore one should pay him less because he is weak.

There is no way out of this situation. Kabylia cannot be saved from starvation by distributing grain. It can only be saved by reducing unemployment and monitoring wages. These things can and should be done immediately.

I learned today that the colonial authorities, anxious to demonstrate concern for the native population, will reward veterans with medals signifying their military service. May I add that I write these lines not with irony but with a certain sadness? I see nothing wrong with rewarding courage and loyalty. But many of the people who are dying of hunger in Kabylia today also served. I wonder how they will present the bit of metal signifying their loyalty to France to their starving children.

### 3 Education

The Kabyles' thirst for learning and taste for study have become legendary. In addition to their natural predisposition to learning and practical intelligence, they quickly grasped the fact that education could be an instrument of emancipation. It is not unusual these days for a village to offer to provide a room or funding or free labor for the purpose of creating a school. Nor is it unusual to see these offers remain without response from the authorities. And Kabyles are not just worried about educating boys. I have not visited a single major town in Kabylia without hearing how eager people are for girls' schools as well. And there is not a single existing school anywhere in Kabylia that is not obliged to turn students away.

Indeed, a shortage of schools is the educational issue in Kabylia today. The region lacks schools, but it does not lack money for education. I will explain this paradox in a moment. Leaving aside the dozen large schools that have been built in recent years, most Kabyle schools date from the late nineteenth century, when the Algerian budget was decided in metropolitan France.

From 1892 to 1912, no schools were built in the region. At the time, the Joly-Jean-Marie Plan envisioned the construction of numerous schools at 5,000 francs apiece. On February 7, 1914, Governor General Lutaud formally announced that 22 new schools and 62 classrooms would be built in Algeria every year. Had these goals been even half realized, the 900,000 native children who are today without schools would have received an education.

For reasons that I need not go into here, the official plan was scrapped. I will summarize the results of this decision in one figure: today, only one-tenth of school-age Kabyle children actually attend school.

Does this mean that Algerian authorities neglected education entirely? The issue is complex. In a recent speech, M. Le Beau [the governor general] stated that several million francs had been devoted to native education, but the statistics I am about to give prove unequivocally that this spending has done little to improve matters. Hence, to put it bluntly, these millions were badly spent, as I propose to show in what follows. But let me describe the situation first.

As one might expect, the country's economic and tourist centers are well served. What interests me here, however, is the fate of the douars and people of Kabylia. I might begin by observing that Tizi-Ouzou, which does have a fine native school with room for 600 students, turns away 500 prospective additional students every year.

In one school I visited in Oumalous, the teachers were forced this past October to turn away a dozen applicants for each class. And there were already 60–80 more students per class than the school was really equipped to handle.

In Beni-Douala, one class serves 86 pupils, some of whom must sit on the floor between benches or on the platform at the front of the room, while others are forced to stand. In Djemaa-Saridj, a splendid school with 250 students had to reject 50 additional applicants in October. The school in Adni, with 106 students, turned away another dozen after dismissing all students above the age of 13.



The situation in the vicinity Michelet is even more revealing. The Aguedal douar, with a population of 11,000, has only one school with two classrooms. The Ittomagh douar, with a population of 10,000 Kabyles, has no school at all. In Beni-Ouacif, the Bou-Abderrahmane school has just turned away more than 100 students.

The village of Aït-Aïlem has maintained a classroom for the past two years, but no teacher has yet been assigned to it.

In the Sidi-Aïch region, 200 prospective students turned up at the beginning of the term in the village of Vieux-Marché. Only 15 were accepted.

The douar of Ikedjane, with a population of 15,000, lacks even a single classroom. The douar of Timzrit, with a similar population, has a one-room schoolhouse. Iyadjadjène (pop. 5,000) has no school. Azrou-N'Bechar (pop. 6,000) has no school.

It has been estimated that 80 percent of the children in the region are deprived of education. I would translate this statistic by saying that nearly 10,000 Kabyle children are left to play every day in the mud of the gutters.

As for the commune of Maillot, I am looking at a list of schools per douar and per capita. Even though this essay is not intended for the society pages, I am afraid that it would be tedious to recount this information in detail. I will mention only that there are just nine classrooms in the region for 30,000 Kabyles. In the Dellys region, in the douar of Beni-Sliem, whose extreme poverty I described previously, there is not a single classroom for a population of 9,000.

The laudable decision of the colonial authorities to educate girls was taken only recently, and 9 out of 10 douars are surely not providing female education. It would be ungracious to try to assign responsibility for this failure. What needs to be said, however, is that Kabyles consider the education of girls to be extremely important and unanimously favor its expansion.

Indeed, it is quite moving to see how clearly some Kabyle males recognize the gap that the unilateral education of boys has created

between themselves and their women. As one of them told me, “ ‘Home’ is now nothing more than a word, a social convention without living content. We are painfully aware that it is impossible to share our feelings with our wives. Give us girls’ schools or this fracture will upset the equilibrium of life here.”

Does this mean that nothing has been done to educate the Kabyles? Not at all. Some splendid schools have been built—nearly a dozen in all, I believe. Each of these schools cost between 700,000 and one million francs. The most sumptuous are surely the schools in Djemaa-Saridj, Tizi-Rached, Tizi-Ouzou, and Tililit. But these schools regularly turn away prospective students, and they do not meet any of the region’s needs.

What Kabylia needs is not a few palatial establishments. It needs many sound and modest schools. I believe that all teachers will back me up when I say that they can live without tiled walls, and all they need is a clean, comfortable classroom. And I also believe that they love their work well enough, as they prove every day in their lonely and difficult teaching in rural areas, that they would rather have two classrooms than a useless pergola.

I saw a symbol of this absurd educational policy on the Port-Gueydon road in the region of Aghrib, one of the harshest in Kabylia. From a hilltop one glimpsed a patch of ocean nestled in a recess between mountain ranges, but that was the only beauty to be seen. As far as the eye could see, arid, rocky land covered with bright broom and lentisk stretched into the distance beneath the merciless sun. And there, in the midst of this vast wasteland devoid of any visible sign of humanity, stood the sumptuous Aghrib school, a veritable symbol of futility.

Here I feel obliged to explain my thought at some length. I don’t know what one ought to think about what one Kabyle man said to me: “Don’t you see, the goal was to give us the smallest number of classrooms with the maximum expenditure of capital.” In any case, my impression is that these schools were built for tourists and investigating commissions

and that they sacrifice the basic needs of the native people on the altar of prestige.

Such a policy strikes me as particularly unfortunate. If there is any justification for prestige, it must come not from impressive appearances but from profound generosity and fraternal understanding.

In the meantime, the same appropriation that built these palatial schools could have been used to build three extra classrooms to serve the students who must be turned away every fall. I have looked into the cost of building a typical two-room schoolhouse of modern and comfortable design along with a couple of adjoining rooms for teachers' housing. Such a school can be built for 200,000 francs. With what it takes to build one palatial school, one can build three of these old-fashioned schoolhouses. This, I think, is enough to judge a policy that is tantamount to giving a 1,000-franc doll to a child who has not eaten for three days.

The Kabyles want schools, then, as they want bread. But I am also convinced that a more general educational reform is needed. When I put the question to Kabyles, they were unanimous in their answers. They will have more schools on the day that the artificial barrier between European and indigenous schools is removed—on the day when two peoples destined to understand each other begin to make each other's acquaintance on the benches of a shared schoolhouse.

Of course, I am under no illusions as to the powers of education. But those who speak so easily about the uselessness of teaching have nevertheless benefited from it themselves. If the authorities really want assimilation, and if these worthy Kabyles are indeed French, then it makes no sense to start off by separating them from the French. If I understand them correctly, this is all they are asking for. And my own feeling is that mutual comprehension will begin only when there is joint schooling. I say "begin" because it must be said that to date there is no mutual understanding, which is why our political authorities have made so many mistakes. All that is needed, however, is a genuinely extended

hand—as I have recently discovered for myself. But it is up to us to break down the walls that keep us apart.

#### 4 The Political Future

Without pretending to be a distinguished economist, I would like to consider in purely commonsensical terms what political, economic, and social future one might like to see for Kabylia. I have said enough about the misery of this region, but one cannot simply describe such distress without saying something about what response is called for.

I would also like to say something about method. In the face of such an urgent situation, we must act quickly, and it would be foolish to contemplate a utopian scheme or advocate impossible solutions. That is why each of the suggestions below starts not with risky principles but with experiments that have already been tried or are currently under way in the region. And of course nothing in this story is invented; everything is taken from reality. As a talented speaker recently put it, in politics there are no copyrights. My goal is to help a friendly people, and the only purpose of these proposals is to serve that goal.

One must start from the principle that if anyone can improve the lot of the Kabyles, change has to begin with the Kabyles themselves. Three-quarters of the population lives under the mixed regime, village-chieftain system.<sup>1</sup> Many other writers have criticized this political form, which bears only a distant resemblance to democracy, and I will not repeat their criticisms here. The abuses due to this system have been abundantly documented. But even within the framework of the mixed commune, the Kabyles now have an opportunity to demonstrate their administrative skills.

With the law of April 27, 1937, a generous legislature opened the possibility of transforming certain Algerian douars into communes run by the native population under the supervision of a French administrator. Several experiments of this sort have been carried out in Arab and Kabyle regions. If these attempts are deemed successful, then

there is no reason to delay extending the douar-commune system. As it happens, an interesting experiment is under way right now in Kabylia, and I wanted to see it for myself. Since January 1938, the douar of Oumalous, a few kilometers from Fort-National, has been operating as a douar-commune under the leadership of M. Hadjeres.

Thanks to his kindness and intelligent competence, I was able to observe the operation of this douar in person and document its achievements. The Oumalous douar includes 18 villages and a population of 1,200. A town hall was built in the geographical center, along with several additional buildings. This town hall is like any other town hall, but for residents of the douar it has the advantage of allowing them to complete administrative formalities without extensive travel. In May 1938, the town hall issued no fewer than 517 administrative documents to citizens of the commune, and in the same year it facilitated the emigration of 515 Kabyles.

With a minimal budget of 200,000 francs, this miniature municipality, staffed by Kabyle officials elected by Kabyle voters, has presided for the past year and a half over an indigenous community in which complaints are rare. For the first time, Kabyles are dealing with officials whose work they can monitor and whom they can approach to talk things over rather than merely obey in silence.

The Kabyles quite rightly attach considerable value to these changes. One therefore cannot be too careful in criticizing recent experiments. M. Hadjeres has nevertheless proposed certain improvements, which strike me as reasonable. To date, voters have been obliged to vote for slates of candidates, with the winning slate then electing its own president. The douar retains its traditional caïd, however, and remains under the supervision of a colonial administrator. The respective functions of these three officials—president of the commune, caïd, and administrator—are not clearly defined, and it would be useful to clarify and delineate them.

Furthermore, the experiments with the douar-commune system have provoked a number of protests, whose motives I will not discuss, and

elicited a number of criticisms that call for further examination. A recent series of articles argued that the douar was an artificial administrative unit and that the creation of douar-communes risked bringing together villages and factions with opposing interests. In most cases this is simply not true, although it does sometimes happen. In any case, the same series of articles proposed establishing native rule at the level of the village rather than the douar, and this is a very bad idea. For one thing, most villages have little if any resources. There are villages, for instance, whose only common property is a single ash or fig tree. For another, there are far too many Kabyle villages to allow an adequate level of administrative supervision.

To be sure, it would be a good idea to group villages that share a common geographical and cultural situation. Perpetuating old divisions in a mixed communal framework would result in administrative complications that are best avoided.

It therefore seems preferable to amend the existing legislation without changing the basic administrative framework. On this point, I can do no better than to summarize the plan that M. Hadjeres explained to me with remarkable lucidity. Essentially, his plan comes down to extending democracy at the douar-commune level and introducing a kind of proportional representation. If the goal is to avoid conflicts of interest, M. Hadjeres is of the opinion that the best way to do this is to allow all interests to be expressed. He therefore proposes that voters no longer be asked to vote for a slate of candidates. Instead, each village should elect its own representatives. These representatives would then come together to form a municipal council, which would elect its own president. In this way, competition among villages within a douar would be eliminated.

In addition, village elections would be based on proportional representation, with each village entitled to one representative for every 800 citizens. In this way, intra-village rivalries would also be eliminated. As a result, the djemaa of Oumalous would be reduced from 20 members to 16. Finally, M. Hadjeres envisions the transformation into communes of all the douars of the mixed commune

of Fort-National, along with the creation of a single budget combining all available resources, which would then be shared among douars in proportion to their needs and population.

This would establish a small federative republic in the heart of Kabyle territory, a republic inspired by deeply democratic principles. As I listened to the president of Oumalous, I appreciated his remarkable lucidity and common sense, which might well serve as an example for many of our democratic officials. In any case, I have set forth his proposal as he described it. I hope that the administration will know how to put it to good use.

If the Oumalous experiment is deemed to have been a success, there is no reason not to extend it elsewhere. Many douars are waiting to be transformed into communes. Around Michelet, for example, there are some that seem even more likely to succeed than Oumalous. They have markets that handle a substantial volume of trade. If the administration wants this experiment to succeed, then these douars, such as Menguellet and Ouacif, should become communes. Frequently, however, the mixed commune opposes this change for douars with markets on the grounds that these markets provide revenue to the commune (as much as 150,000 francs per year in some cases). But these douars are virtually the only viable ones. If, moreover, one believes that the douar-commune should within a short period of time replace the mixed commune altogether, then one will agree that it is the latter that should be sacrificed.

Furthermore, the authorities should not hesitate to transform other douars, such as Ouadhias, into full-fledged communes. There are already more than 100 French voters in the center of Ouadhias. Its market brings in 70,000 francs a year, and it yields 100,000 francs in taxes. This would be a good place to experiment with allowing French citizens of Kabyle descent to gain experience in public affairs.

In any case, such a generous policy would clear the way for the administrative emancipation of Kabylia. To achieve that goal, it is enough today to really want it. It can be pursued in parallel with

material assistance to this unfortunate region. We have made enough mistakes along the way to be able to benefit from the lessons that failure always has to teach. For instance, I know of few arguments more specious than that of personal status<sup>2</sup> when it comes to extending political rights to natives, but when applied to Kabylia, the argument becomes ridiculous, because it was we French who imposed a personal status on the Kabyles by Arabizing their country with the caïd system and introducing the Arabic language. It ill behoves us today to reproach the Kabyles for embracing the status we imposed on them.

That the Kabyle people are ready for greater independence and self-rule was obvious to me one morning when, after returning from Oumalou, I fell into conversation with M. Hadjeres. We had gone to a gap in the mountains through which one could see the vast extent of a douar that stretched all the way to the horizon. My companion named the various villages for me and explained what life was like in each one. He described how the village imposed solidarity on each of its members, forcing all residents to attend every funeral in order to make sure that the poor man's burial was no less impressive than the rich man's. He also told me that banishment from the community was the worst possible punishment, which no one could bear.

As we looked down on that vast, sunbaked land from a dizzying height, the trees resembled clouds of vapor steaming up from the hot soil, and I understood what bound these people to one another and made them cling to their land. I also understood how little they needed in order to live in harmony with themselves. So how could I fail to understand their desire to take charge of their own lives and their hunger to become at last what they truly are: courageous, conscientious human beings from whom we could humbly take lessons in dignity and justice?

1. For administrative purposes, the Algerian colony was divided into départements. Each département was further divided into "mixed communes." At the same time there were also entities known as communes de plein exercice, here translated as "full-fledged communes." There were also "douar-communes," created by a senatus consult of May 23, 1863, governed by an assembly known as the



djemaa, headed by a native chieftain known as the caïd. In this essay Camus discusses a reform under which mixed and douar-communes were transformed into full-fledged communes.—Trans.

2. The law of personal status is a province of French law dealing with individual and family matters. In some colonies, the personal status of natives allowed for them to be treated differently from French nationals without violating the principle of equality before the law.—Trans.

## 5 The Economic and Social Future

Kabylia has too many people and not enough grain. It consumes more than it produces. Its labor, compensated with ridiculously low wages, is not sufficient to pay for what it consumes. Its émigrés, whose numbers dwindle year after year, can no longer make up for this trade deficit.

If we want to return Kabylia to prosperity, save its people from famine, and do our duty toward the Kabyle people, we must therefore change everything about the region's economy.

Common sense suggests that if Kabylia consumes more than it produces, we must first try to increase the purchasing power of the Kabyle people so that the wages of their labor can compensate for the shortages of their production. We must also try to reduce the gap between imports and exports by increasing the latter as much as possible.

These are the main lines of a policy that everyone agrees is essential. The two aspects of this policy must not be separated, however. There is no way to raise the standard of living in Kabylia without paying people more and paying more for their products. It is not just humanity that is trampled underfoot when people are paid six francs a day for their work, it is also logic. And the low prices paid for Kabylia's cash crops are an affront not only to justice but also to common sense.

In this essay I will review a number of the constant themes of this inquiry. Kabyle labor is paid as it is only because of unemployment and

the latitude allowed to employers. Wages will therefore not become normal until unemployment has been reduced, competition in the labor market has been eliminated, and tariffs have been restored.

Until labor inspectors are actually dispatched to Kabylia, it is desirable that the state employ as many workers as possible. Monitoring of the market will then be automatic. Unemployment must be reduced in three stages: first by a program of public works, second by the establishment of job training programs, and third by the organization of emigration.

Public works programs are of course part of every demagogic political platform. But the essence of demagoguery is that programs are proposed but never implemented. Here, the goal is the opposite.

To undertake public works in a country that has no need of them is indeed a waste of public funds. But need I point out how sorely Kabylia lacks for roads and water? Not only would a major public works program eliminate the bulk of unemployment and raise wages to a normal level; it would also yield surplus economic value for Kabylia, and sooner or later we will reap the benefits.

This policy has already been initiated. Where it was systematically pursued in the commune of Port-Gueydon and the douar of Beni-Yenni, the results were immediately apparent. Port-Gueydon now boasts of 17 new fountains and a number of new roads. Beni-Yenni is one of the wealthiest douars in Kabylia, and its workers are paid 22 francs a day.

The major criticism that one can make, however, is that these experiments remain isolated. And large amounts of public funds have been dispersed in small subsidies that have had virtually no effect. Government officials regularly ask, "Where are we to find the money?" But for now, at least, the problem is not to come up with new funding but just to use money that has already been appropriated.

Nearly 600 million francs have been directed toward Kabylia. It is now 10 days since I tried to describe the horrifying results. What is needed

now is an intelligent and comprehensive plan that can be systematically implemented. We want nothing to do with politics as usual, with half measures and compromises, small handouts and scattered subsidies. Kabylia wants the opposite of business as usual: namely, smart and generous policy. It will take vision to pull together all the appropriated sums, scattered subsidies, and wasted charity if Kabylia is to be saved by the Kabyles themselves, if the dignity of these peasants is to be restored through useful labor paid at a just wage.

We managed to come up with the money to give the countries of Europe nearly 400 billion francs, all of which is now gone forever. It seems unlikely that we cannot come up with one-hundredth that amount to improve the lot of people whom we have not yet made French, to be sure, but from whom we demand the sacrifices of French citizens.

Furthermore, wages are so low only because the Kabyles do not qualify for protection under existing labor laws. That is where job training for both industrial and agricultural workers comes in. There are occupational training schools in Kabylia. In Michelet, there is a school for blacksmiths, carpenters, and masons. It has trained good workers, some of whom live in Michelet itself. But the school can train only a dozen students at a time, and that is not enough.

There are also schools in arboriculture, like the one in Mechtras, but it graduates only 30 students every two years. This is an experiment, not an institution.

These efforts must now be expanded, and every center must be equipped with a vocational training school to train people whose skills and desire to assimilate are proverbial.

All of Kabylia's problems are related, moreover. There is no better illustration of this than the fact that there is no point training skilled workers if they cannot find jobs. For now, however, all the jobs are in metropolitan France. So no training policy will work unless something is done to help Kabyles emigrate.

To that end, the first thing to do is to simplify the formalities, and the second is to assist with emigration. Right now it is possible to help Kabyles find jobs in farming. I am not speaking of the offers coming from the Niger Office. There is no point sending Kabyle peasants to die for the benefit of private firms in a lethal foreign environment. But the colonial authorities could still distribute nearly 200,000 hectares of land in Algeria if they chose to.

In Kabylia itself, near Boghni, an experiment of this type is under way in the Bou-Mani estates. Meanwhile, people are fleeing the south of France, and we had to bring in tens of thousands of Italians to colonize our own soil.

Today, those Italians are returning home. There is no reason why Kabyles cannot colonize this region. We are told that "Kabyles are too attached to their mountains to leave them." My answer is first of all that there are presently 50,000 Kabyles in France who have already left those same mountains. In addition, I will mention the response of one Kabyle peasant to whom I put the question: "You are forgetting that we do not have anything to eat. We have no choice."

I anticipate the next objection: "But these Kabyles will eventually abandon their land and return home." This may well be true, but is there anyone who does not see that Kabyles have been coming to France generation after generation and that no landowner will leave his land until he has sold it to someone younger than himself?

In any case, these few measures should suffice to raise the wages of Kabyle workers to a decent level. And it bears repeating that the sums already appropriated should suffice to get the project under way. The policy will begin to yield benefits when its extension becomes inevitable. But the fruits of such a policy cannot truly be reaped unless the prices paid for Kabylia's agricultural production are also raised at the same time.

Once again, common sense points the way toward a constructive policy. Although the region does produce a small amount of grain, its

main cash crops are figs and olives. Since it is futile to try to counter the forces of nature, attention should therefore be directed to these products in the hope of achieving equilibrium with local consumption.

Unless I am missing something, there are only three ways to earn more with a given product. First, one can try to increase the quantity produced. Second, one can try to improve the quality. And third, one can try to stop the market price from falling. The second and third methods often go together, and all three are applicable in Kabylia.

Increasing the production of figs and olives should be considered, and it is also worth considering whether complementary products such as cherries and carobs might also prove viable. Both experiments have been tried in the commune of Port-Gueydon, and these should be treated as constructive examples.

In 1938, the commune assisted in the planting of 1,000 new saplings. This year, 10,000 to 15,000 trees will be planted. And all of this has been done without supplementary appropriations. The Société Indigène de Prévoyance guaranteed loans to pay for the planting, and shoots were delivered to the fellahin (peasants) who asked for them. They had the opportunity to observe the quality and yield of these plants in test groves planted on communal land.

As with the fig tree, which is planted when saplings are two years old but does not yield fruit until it is five, the fellahin will, for the first five years, pay only interest on the minimal capital required to purchase the saplings. The interest rate is only 4 percent. After five years, the tree begins to produce figs, and the Kabyle peasant then has five additional years to pay off the loan.

To give you an idea of the return on investment, I should add that even if only one-third of the new trees become productive (which is a conservative estimate), the fellah will still come out ahead, and his success will have cost the state practically nothing. No comment is necessary. If this experiment is aggressively expanded to other areas, the results will soon be obvious.

When it comes to improving existing products and raising their market price, the task is immense. Here I will discuss only the key elements: setting up drying houses to improve the quality of dried figs and establishing cooperatives to produce olive oil. The traditional methods of Kabyle agriculture are not well suited to increasing yields. The usual pruning of olive trees, which resembles an amputation, the unsystematic removal of saplings, the racks used to dry figs on rooftops or under carob trees that leave the fruit vulnerable to parasites—none of these things enhances the quality of the final product.

Many communes have therefore experimented with drying houses. The most instructive of these experiments were carried out in Azazga and Sidi-Aïch. In Azazga, the rational methods implemented by state-sponsored advisers increased the price of the final product by 120 percent the first year and 80 percent the second year. In Sidi-Aïch, figs from the drying house sold for an average of 260 francs per quintal compared with 190 for native figs. In Azazga, 120 fellahin participated in the experiment by bringing their figs to the drying house, and they earned 180,000 francs in revenue. After initial resistance, the majority of fellahin therefore embraced the innovation. A private cooperative is planned in Temda, to be managed by the producers themselves. This is likely to be an image of Kabylia's future.

Setting up olive oil cooperatives has been a more difficult process. Some administrators oppose the idea owing to opposition from lowland settlers, who prefer to purchase olives at low cost rather than high-priced olive oil. In addition, middlemen and brokers would stand to lose under the new system and therefore oppose it. But Kabyle farmers need credit, for which they turn to these same middlemen, who lend them money in exchange for a claim on their future production.

This obstacle can be overcome, however, if olive oil cooperatives are associated with a credit union that could fill the role of middleman. A final argument that is sometimes heard insists that Kabyle farmers would nevertheless continue to turn to other middlemen for needed

cash. But this is an argument that is raised against every proposed innovation, and it has always been indefensible.

Unfortunately, the methods used by Kabyle farmers allow them to harvest olives only once every two years. A more rational system needs to be imposed, and it is certain that output would then be close to doubled. European factories have increased their yield, but the methods they use ensure that the oil produced has an acid content of at least 1.5 to 2 percent and therefore has an unpleasant taste.

Finally, these policies can succeed only if additional steps are taken to deal with other issues. Housing, for example, could be based on the model established by the Loucheur Law.<sup>1</sup> The beneficiaries of housing assistance could contribute by providing land, labor, and materials (nearly every Kabyle owns a plot of land). There are also grounds for reconsidering the way in which communal revenues are shared between the European and native population and for asking Europeans to make the necessary sacrifices.

These policies would revive the real Kabylia. The dreadful misery of the region would at last be alleviated and compensated. I know that money is needed to achieve these goals, but I say again, let us begin by making better use of the money that has already been appropriated, because what is missing is not so much money, perhaps, as commitment. Nothing great has ever been accomplished without courage and lucidity. If these policies are to succeed, it is not enough to hope for improvement now and then: our determination must be constant and focused.

I know that many will object "that there is no reason why the colony and colonists should pay." And I agree. So let us not wait for the colonists to act, because we cannot be sure that they will. But if you say that it is up to metropolitan France to step in, then I agree with you for two reasons. First, the status quo proves that a system that divorces Algeria from France is bad for France. And second, when the interests of Algeria and France coincide, then you can be sure that hearts and minds will soon follow.

1. The Loucheur Law of July 13, 1928, provided state aid for low-cost housing.—Trans.

## 6 Conclusion

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 Kabylia 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