

HAMOUDA BENSÄÏ: TRAJECTORY AND CHALLENGES (1902–1998)



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Abstract:

Throughout its extensive history, spanning from antiquity through the medieval and contemporary eras, Algeria has produced numerous prominent intellectuals who have left an indelible mark on the nation's historical record. Among these icons is Hamouda Bensäï, who emerged during the first half of the 20th century amidst French colonial hegemony and the repressive policies enforced against the Algerian people.

Despite facing a superior military power, the Algerian populace engaged in sustained resistance following the initial occupation in 1830s. While the Aures Revolution of 1916 represented the final major popular uprising of its kind, it significantly broadened the scope for political and cultural resistance. This movement manifested through literature, correspondence, diplomatic delegations, the press, and the formation of political associations.

The French administration sought to systematically dismantle these efforts through force, including summary executions, imprisonment, and exile. This article examines the life of Hamouda Bensäï, a preeminent Algerian thinker whose life was decimated by these colonial authorities. Through the systematic application of torture, Bensäï suffered severe psychological trauma and periods of mental instability that profoundly impacted his personal and professional trajectory.

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Introduction:

The Algerian nation has historically been a prolific source of intellectuals and scholars who have shaped its legacy across various eras and disciplines, from politics and culture to economics and warfare. Among these figures is Mohamed Hamouda Bensâï, who remains relatively obscure within his own country and largely overlooked in the cultural sphere. Indeed, he exemplifies the adage that “no prophet is accepted in his own land”.

Bensâï lived through a tumultuous period of Algerian history, marked by French colonial occupation, the systematic suppression of Algerian identity, and the state-sanctioned torture of its people. Despite these challenges, Bensâï and his contemporaries actively resisted colonial policies, often at great personal cost. This struggle against the French administration defined his intellectual and political path, ultimately leading to significant personal hardship.

This study examines how the French colonial administration systematically marginalized Algerian intellectual elites. It focuses on how the administration used institutional power and Orientalist structures to suppress indigenous voices. The study investigates the life and legacy of Hamouda Bensâï, addressing the following questions:

- Who was Hamouda Bensâï, and what was his role in the national movement?
- How did the French authorities respond to his intellectual activism?
- What was his fate after Algerian independence?

Using a historical-analytical method and biographical approach, the study traces Bensâï's development from Algerian reformist schools to the Sorbonne. The research hypothesizes that Bensâï's academic and professional obstacles were the result of a deliberate colonial policy aimed at dismantling the growing Algerian intelligentsia and that the challenges he faced were a form of intellectual neutralization.

The primary objective is to restore Hamouda Bensâï's historical memory and evaluate his intellectual contributions to the *Badissia* School. This includes documenting the specific colonial surveillance mechanisms employed against Algerian scholars in France and

evaluating Bensaï's influence on Malek Bennabi and the North African student movement.

THE FIRST TOPIC: THE INTELLECTUAL GENESIS AND ACADEMIC CHALLENGES

This topic examines the foundational years of Hamouda Bensaï, delineating his journey from the reformist schools of Constantine to the academic corridors of the Sorbonne. The analysis scrutinizes the author's transition from early journalistic resistance in Algeria to the systemic institutional challenges he encountered upon entering the French academic sphere.

First requirement: Foundations of Reformist Thought and Journalism

This requirement explores the pedagogical and spiritual underpinnings of Bensaï's upbringing, underscoring the synthesis between traditional Islamic scholarship and modern bilingual education that informed his early intellectual contributions to the Algerian press.

First section: Biographical Roots and Bilingual Education

Mohamed Hamouda Bensaï was born on October 7th, 1902, in Batna, into a modest and devout family. His father served as a clerk for a French notary in his hometown. Bensaï grew up with two siblings: a younger brother, Salah, and a sister, Atra.

During his youth, he enrolled in the "Grande École" in Constantine after successfully passing the entrance examination. The four-year educational program was bilingual; while the French curriculum mirrored that of standard secondary schools (excluding Greek and Latin); the Arabic subjects were identical to those taught at the prestigious Zaytuna Mosque.

Beyond formal schooling, Bensaï pursued theological studies at the Zawiya Sanoussiya of Sidi Fathallah under Cheikh Ben El Abed (EL ABED, 2008, p: 64). He also frequented the evening lectures of Cheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis (EL FODIL, 2012, p: 20) at the Lakhdar Mosque (1996, p: 83) in Constantine. As a product of the Reformist School and a dedicated student of the Association of Muslim Scholars, he was profoundly shaped by Ben Badis's intellectual framework (BEN ZAINEB, p: 06).

In his book, *In the Way of My Faith*, Bensaï reflects on the impact of these teachings, particularly the daily lessons on the *Nawawi's Forty Hadith*. He noted: "they were particularly significant because they

resonated with my personal sentiments and articulated the principles of Islamic ethics with concise clarity.”

Second section: Journalistic Contributions and Anti-Assimilationist Critique

During the 1920s, Bensâï became an active reader of reformist newspapers (BOUSAFSAF, 2005, p: 269) such as *El Muntaqid* (2005) and *El Chihab* (NACER, 1978, p: 66-68). He often visited Ben Badis at his office on Alexis Lambert Street to engage in calm, intellectual dialogues. Bensâï expressed deep admiration for the Cheikh, describing him as a figure of ‘great stature’, while Ben Badis reciprocated this respect, likely recognizing the young man's early intellectual aptitude.

By this time, Bensâï had already begun to analyze the struggle between the Algerian people and French colonialism. He was especially critical of the ‘Assimilations’ (*Indemaj*) collaborators who advocated for total integration into the French regime. He sought to enlighten his compatriots about the dangers of these colonial schemes through written rebuttals.

One notable instance involved a lengthy critique Bensâï wrote in response to Mohamed Zekrine, a municipal councilor who supported integration. Upon reviewing the work, Cheikh Ben Badis was so impressed by its depth that he remarked to his assistant, Ahmed Bouchmal: “I was unaware that such intellectual capacity existed among our youth” (HAMANI, 2004, p: 42).

Hamouda developed an interest in journalism early in life (NACER, 1978, p: 42), publishing extensively in Algeria during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1929, he assumed the roles of editor and translator at *El Najah* newspaper (NACER, 1978, p: 48). Among his oeuvre is a translation and concise synopsis of a lecture delivered by the French Jewish writer Pierre Barave, entitled ‘Judaism in French Literature’.

Bensâï gained renown for his precise translations, thorough summaries, and insightful commentary on the concepts advanced by the Jewish writer. This practice stood out as atypical in the Arabic-language press of the time; such analytical and evaluative discourse was uncharacteristic of a press unaccustomed to intellectual criticism. His efforts prompted Cheikh Abdulhafiz Ben El Hachimi, the editor of *El Najah*, along with numerous influential figures such as Cheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis and Cheikh Ben El Abed, to extend their felicitations and benedictions.

Second requirement: Political Awareness and the Critique of Colonial Policy

This requirement examines the transition of Bensaï's activism into the French metropole, where his academic aspirations were met with systemic institutional hostility. It scrutinizes his scholarly pursuits at the Sorbonne and analyzes the deliberate administrative mechanisms and Orientalist surveillance employed to neutralize his burgeoning intellectual influence.

First section: The Sorbonne and the Clash with Louis Massignon

Additionally, he exhibited a sharp awareness of prevailing political developments and the issues emerging on the national stage. He was particularly privy to France's conspiracies, falsehoods, and defamation against the Algerian people, recognizing that superficial colonial reforms did not align with Algerian aspirations. The deceptive nature of the elections served as a prime illustration of this phenomenon.

On Monday, May 20th, 1929, he published a seminal article entitled '*The Mirage of Politics and the Call to the Guidance of the Qur'an*'. In this piece, he strongly criticized political systems that failed to prioritize the well-being of individuals and society, contending that such practices merely served the personal interests of the ruling elite. Furthermore, he articulated a stance in favor of *shura*—an Islamic jurisprudential concept emphasizing consultation—while demonstrating disapproval of Western-style democratic systems, including party formation and the competitive pursuit of leadership titles. He argued that effective political engagement necessitated the election of individuals who were both competent and genuine.

This article evoked a profound response from the Algerian populace, from the western city of Oran to the eastern city of Batna. Notably, the court judge lauded the work after reading it.

It is evident that the author's intellectual contributions extended beyond journalism into the realm of literary and theological analysis. His erudition is demonstrated in his critique of books such as *Safwat El Irfan fi Tafsir El Qur'an (The Elite of Gnosis in the Interpretation of the Qur'an)* by Mohamed Farid Wajdi, a volume bestowed upon him by Cheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis. Ultimately, Hamouda Bensaï demonstrated a profound and scholarly engagement with the cultural traditions of the Arab-Islamic heritage.

At this juncture, the author's experiences and perspectives profoundly influenced his life path and personal development. This influence is clearly reflected in his oeuvre; his compositions, critiques, and lectures demonstrate the growing intricacy of his thought processes. Furthermore, the debates he engaged in with prominent intellectuals and cultural figures—particularly within the context of French Orientalism—further reflect the depth and breadth of his intellectual reach.

Following his arrival in France, a nation that formally endorses the principles of freedom, justice, fraternity, equality, and human rights, the author confronted a series of severe challenges. These included systematic oppression, suffocation of his activities, and various forms of prohibition and deprivation (GUESSOUM, 2015, p: 30-34). These experiences are pivotal to comprehending both his scholarly output and his lived experience with the ramifications of Orientalist power structures in France.

He pursued his studies under the tutelage of one of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars' most prominent elders, Cheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis. Despite this close mentorship, the subject declined to become formally affiliated with the Association. This decision may have been motivated by a strategic attempt to avoid the direct supervisory authority of the French administration and its agents.

However, despite his lack of formal affiliation, he faced various forms of institutional adversity, including state discontent, torture, oppression, and relentless persecution. Consequently, his mental state declined significantly, leading to a psychological crisis that forced him to abandon his academic pursuits. This period ultimately resulted in a marked and tragic shift in his public persona and the loss of stability in his general life.

Following this period of cultural and intellectual immersion, Hamouda Bensāi moved to France to pursue advanced studies, eventually settling in Paris. He enrolled at the Institute of Sociology at the Sorbonne University to continue his higher education, specifically registering in the Department of Philosophy. There, he commenced work on a doctoral thesis (GUESSOUM, 2015, p: 31) entitled '*The Moral Conscience of El Ghazali*'.

This research topic motivated him to delve deeply into the vast and rich Islamic tradition. He devoted himself to the foundational works of El Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, El Hallaj, Ibn Sina, and other distinguished

figures of Islamic philosophy. To further broaden his intellectual scope, he explored Western philosophy and critically evaluated the scholarship produced by prominent Orientalists (TOUHAMI, 2004, p: 46) regarding Islam and its heritage.

This era marked a ‘golden age’ for Western Orientalist thought, which was then at its peak. The French school of Orientalism (MARISH, 2009, p: 70), in particular, was flourishing and held significant institutional power. It was during this time that Bensâï clashed with one of the leading pioneers of this school, the Orientalist Louis Massignon.

Second section: Systematic Oppression and Psychological Decline

The French administration, influenced by Massignon, monitored Bensâï’s movements and placed severe restrictions on his activities. This intervention played a decisive role in the destruction of his personal and professional life, ultimately impeding him from completing his academic studies and preventing him from defending his doctoral thesis.

The period during which Hamouda Bensâï traveled to France coincided with a notable increase in Algerian migration (HILAL, 1995, p: 76). These immigrants were primarily seeking livelihoods to support their families in the face of restrictive French colonial policies. This systemic suppression resulted in extreme poverty and a critical ‘dearth of bread’ among the Algerian populace.

Many Algerians were reduced to the status of *khammasin* (sharecroppers receiving only one-fifth of the harvest), performing forced labor for the benefit of colonists, local leaders (*caïds*), and pashas. These individuals, who were previously independent proprietors of landed estates and farms, had been systematically dispossessed of their property through the implementation of unjust legislation (MERIOUCH, 2018, p: 24).

This era was also characterized by a surge in political mobilization among Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans, and individuals from other Arab, Islamic, and African nations residing in France. This activity became particularly pronounced in the aftermath of the 1919 Peace Conference.

During this time, Western powers—including France—sought to project an image of themselves as democratic nations and guardians of human rights. They attempted to portray a facade of inclusivity toward diverse racial and ethnic groups; however, this rhetoric stood in stark

contrast to their ongoing violent subjugation of colonized peoples and territories.

In Paris, Hamouda Bensaï encountered a heterogeneous community of immigrants from diverse nationalities, including both Arabs and non-Arabs from Africa, Asia, and the Americas. This vibrant demographic included laborers, students, and various other social segments. Exposure to such human diversity significantly broadened his perceptions and fostered an openness toward the multifaceted cultures and historical experiences of peoples worldwide. Students, in particular—being his peers—played a pivotal role in this process of cultural and intellectual awakening.

During this era, various Algerian political currents were highly active in both France and Algeria. Proponents of Integration (*Indemaj*) engaged in significant efforts, while the Independence movement (MOUFDI, 2003, p: 81) initially emerged and flourished in France, alongside Reformist and Communist movements (BOUSAFSAF, 2005, p: 272). Algerians utilized a wide range of mediums to express their resistance and struggle, including:

- Political parties, associations, and clubs;
- Publications such as newspapers and magazines;
- Literary works, including theater, poetry, short stories, and novels.

This cultural and intellectual momentum exerted a profound influence on the thinking and aspirations of Hamouda Bensaï, who was already an established cultural activist in Algeria. Paris provided an environment that initially fostered his talents and conceptual ideas. However, the French administration—recognizing his ideological inclinations and his exceptional aptitude for debate, dialogue, and critical analysis—began to closely monitor his movements within the immigrant and student populations.

Consequently, the renowned French Orientalist Louis Massignon was tasked with overseeing him. Massignon worked to impose severe limitations on Bensaï's activities, confining his intellectual reach across various domains and even systematically sabotaging his ability to secure a livelihood.

THE SECOND TOPIC: INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCE, RESISTANCE, AND LEGACY

This topic explores the enduring scholarly influence of Bensaï notwithstanding the circumstances of his historical marginalization. Particular emphasis is placed on his pivotal role as a mentor to the Algerian student elite in Paris and the subsequent 'internal exile' he experienced upon returning to his native land.

First requirement: Mentorship and the North African Student Movement

This requirement analyzes the interpersonal and intellectual bonds formed by Bensaï with his fellow scholars, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between Bensaï and Malek Bennabi as a catalyst for transformative Algerian philosophical thought.

First section: The Intellectual Partnership with Malek Bennabi

In France, Hamouda Bensaï emerged as an influential intellectual mentor (BEN ZAINEB, p: 50) to a prominent circle of Algerian, Arab, and Muslim students. These individuals were deeply shaped by reformist ideals and a shared commitment to the unity of the Arab Maghreb. Within this scholarly environment, he guided several key figures who would later leave a significant mark on Algerian history.

Among his closest associates was Malek Bennabi (CHERAFI, 2008, p: 94), who was then pursuing studies at the Higher School of Mechanics and Electricity. He also mentored his own younger brother, Salah Bensaï, as well as Ali Ben Ahmed, a cousin of Malek Bennabi who was enrolled at the School of Oriental Languages. This group formed a cohesive intellectual unit, often engaging in deep debates that bridged their technical training with their cultural and national aspirations.

Concurrent with these personal mentorships, the Association of Muslim Students of North Africa (MIAD, 2013, p: 113-114) was becoming an active force in both Algeria and France. Bensaï played a significant role in the intellectual development of its members by disseminating his ideas and critical perspectives. His presence served as a primary source of enlightenment, effectively shaping the political and cultural consciousness.

Hamouda Bensaï settled in the Latin Quarter of Paris, alongside his student Malek Bennabi and a diverse community of immigrants from all corners of the globe. He held regular meetings with Bennabi, where they exchanged perspectives and deliberated on a myriad of Islamic concepts and historical issues. These dialogues contributed significantly

to Bennabi's prolific intellectual output, as seen in seminal works such as *'The Qur'anic Phenomenon, Witness of the Century, and The Decay'*. This intellectual debt is explicitly acknowledged by Bennabi himself throughout these writings.

In *'The Qur'anic Phenomenon*, Bennabi offers a detailed tribute to his mentor's influence:

"Bensaï was a model of integrity, characterized by meticulousness and diligence. Moreover, he was my instructor in Islamic philosophy, and I owe him the tribute I paid in the dedication of this book. He enabled me to access the spirit of the Qur'an in a manner unattainable by any Azhari teacher, facilitating a unique educational experience. He played a pivotal role in my development, particularly regarding moral values, offering invaluable guidance on numerous occasions. I believe my ideas are often those that had not yet reached maturity in his own mind—or perhaps they migrated toward me. During our discussions, he was usually the principal architect of the ideas, while I assumed the role of their organizer and doctrinal interpreter. We addressed countless problems together; it was my friend who revealed the significance of the Battle of Saffin, which I later interpreted methodologically within the cycles of Islamic civilization" (BENNABI, p: 98).

Bensaï was regarded as Bennabi's sole confidant, with whom he shared a profound connection marked by total trust. Bennabi asserted: "Among all my brothers in faith, I had only one confidant: Mohamed Bensaï. With him, I shared my thoughts and reflections, and he was privy to my bitterness and sorrow" (BENNABI, p: 31).

This fraternal bond served as a paradigm of the interconnection between master, student, and friend. However, this relationship deteriorated in the early 1950s, likely due to the severe psychological distress Bensaï was enduring. He had urged Bennabi to delay publishing his works until they had further matured, fearing their premature impact on Islamic thought. In his pain, he pleaded with Bennabi to 'allow him to suffer in peace' (BENNABI, p: 377). Despite this tragic cooling of their friendship, the bond remained; upon arriving in Algiers in September 1977, Bensaï attempted to locate the grave of his former student, but his search met with failure.

Second section: Cultural Awakening in the Latin Quarter

Philosopher André Gide made the following notable comment: "A young Muslim by the name of Hamouda Bensaï paid me a visit, and I

must admit that I was astounded by his ideas”. This comment highlights one of many notable relationships that Hamouda Bensâï had with his peers in the intellectual and cultural domains. He had visited Gide at the ‘Union for Truth’, a prestigious venue regularly frequented by prominent philosophers, thinkers, and writers.

The esteem he garnered was widespread, encompassing commendation and profound admiration for his intellectual brilliance from a plethora of intellectuals. The distinguished author Jacques Henri Ambroise remarked: “Your writing exhibits a commendable command of the French language; there are many accomplished writers who would be pleased to demonstrate a similar level of proficiency” (BEZIANE, 2009, p: 78).

Furthermore, Augustine Berque described him as the “leader of the Islamic realist movement”. Along with Malek Bennabi, Bensâï was also a frequent guest at the home of the historian Eugène Jung. These testimonies confirm that Bensâï was not merely a doctoral candidate, but a formative thinker and a prominent architect of intellectual awareness.

Despite this high esteem from Western intellectuals, Bensâï simultaneously faced fierce opposition from the Orientalist establishment. This was most notably embodied by the French Orientalist Louis Massignon (MUTABQANI, 2011, p: 70), who meticulously monitored the activities of North African students. Massignon tightened surveillance on Bensâï, Malek Bennabi, and the members of the Association of Muslim Students of North Africa.

The French colonial administration was deeply unsettled by the unity of students from Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria, whose collective anti-colonial discourse directly challenged the "divide and conquer" strategy. This institutional pressure was further intensified by the political activities of Emir Khaled (KADDACHE, 1973) and Messali Hadj. The rise of independence-oriented thought among Maghrebi immigrants led to severe restrictions on their freedoms, with the Orientalist establishment playing a key role in tracking and undermining the intellectual elite of the movement.

Faced with the plight of Arab and Muslim immigrants, as well as individuals of diverse backgrounds, Hamouda Bensâï challenged both the Orientalist Massignon and the oppressive French administration. He aimed to invigorate the community, elevate Muslims, and resist the

assimilationist ideology of Western-influenced figures like Mohammed El Saleh Ben Djaloul, Ibn El Tohami, and Rabah Zenati.

In collaboration with Malek Bennabi, he sought to liberate the Muslim individual by drawing upon their heritage and past. This involved a return to core Islamic principles, rejecting colonial-era innovations and superstitions promoted by deviant Sufi orders. He pursued this goal by offering a renewed interpretation of Islamic thought, relevant to the challenges of the Renaissance, and disseminated his ideas through: (LOUENNAS, 2012, p: 80)

- Lectures and seminars ;
- Cultural associations and clubs ;
- Targeting Algerian immigrants and other groups.

Second requirement: Public Activism and the Final Years in Batna

The final requirement addresses the return of Bensäï to Algeria and his steadfast commitment to cultural reform. It analyzes the 'alienation' of his final years and the posthumous acknowledgment of his role as a preeminent scholar of the Badissia School.

First section: Lectures on Islam and Modernity

In December 1931, as vice-president of the Association of Algerian Muslim Students in Paris, Bensäï lectured in French on 'The Qur'an and Politics' at the association's headquarters. He delivered a similar lecture in Arabic at El Taraki Club (LOUENNAS, 2012) in Algiers on August 28th, 1932, amidst the establishment of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, the Association of Sunni Scholars (Abou El Kacem, 2007, p: 122), and the 'Star of North Africa' (BOUSAFSAF, 1996, p: 89) independence movement.

Later, he delivered lectures titled 'Our Master Muhammad and Women' and, in 1933, 'The Arab East and Its Troubling Fate'. These engagements contributed more to his fame than his articles from the 1920s. He resumed publishing in 1949 with 'Islam is the Religion of Justice' in the Algerian Republic newspaper.

In this article, he presented Islam as humanity's savior, advocating the Prophet's virtuous life and the just rule of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, particularly Abu Bakr Al Siddiq and Umar Ibn Al Khattab, whom he highlighted as eternal symbols of conscience, integrity, and justice. Concurrently, he led the French Association of North Africa alongside

French intellectual Marcelin Beaulieu, whom he knew through ‘the Christian Union of Paris Youth’.

French intelligence closely monitored Hamouda Bensâï’s cultural activities, prompted by the Orientalist Louis Massignon. In his writings, Massignon identified both Bensâï and Malek Bennabi as formidable opponents of French policy in the Maghreb and Algeria in particular. He described Bensâï—a student from Batna—as a ‘militant nationalist’ and a veteran of the North African student movement. Consequently, Massignon actively sought to impede Bensâï’s doctoral thesis and defense while systematically harassing him even in his menial labor roles, which were necessary for his survival in the absence of a scholarship.

Regarding this period of hardship, Bensâï recalled: “In June 1935, severe poverty forced me to work as a laborer in a factory on the outskirts of Paris. On December 15th, 1935, I attended a lecture by Louis Massignon at the Christian Union titled ‘The Restlessness of Islam’, where Massignon noted my presence. On December 26th, I received a notice from the factory management stating, ‘We regret to inform you that your employment will be terminated effective January 6th, 1936.’”

Bensâï became convinced that this dismissal was orchestrated by Massignon, who wielded immense influence within the French administration (BEZIANE, 2009, p: 88). Malek Bennabi later famously characterized Massignon as “...the spider of the Collège de France and an informant in scholar's clothing” (BENNABI, p: 28).

After realizing Massignon’s true nature, Hamouda Bensâï felt a deep sense of disillusionment, stating: “I hold myself culpable for my sentiments toward you”. This marked a definitive end to his earlier hopes of establishing an interfaith dialogue between ‘Muslim Arabs and Christian Frenchmen’. He later remarked that Massignon’s betrayal was more painful to him than the historical colonial atrocities.

Cheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis was deeply moved to tears upon learning of Bensâï’s hardship, lamenting: “Why didn’t he write to me? A fund exists to aid struggling students”. Faced with these suffocating conditions and threats to his freedom, Bensâï returned to Algeria, beginning a new chapter defined by adversity and marginalization.

Second section: The Return to the Homeland and Historical Marginalization

Bensaï's return to his hometown of Batna in Algeria (BEN ZAINEB, p: 10) was marked by significant personal and intellectual loss. Having embarked on a journey to France with the objective of obtaining a doctorate, he returned without the academic accolade he had sought. This outcome signaled the conclusion of a chapter in his intellectual pursuits, marking a premature end to his academic journey. However, he brought back a crucial insight: the French colonial regime fundamentally opposed Algerian culture and the presence of enlightened Algerians in both Algeria and France.

Many Algerians shared, or even surpassed, Bensaï's experience. Mubarak Jellouah (CHEREFI, 2008, p: 131) was murdered and thrown into the Seine River in France, and his death was falsely ruled a suicide resulting from psychological pressure. Malek Bennabi's cousin was also assassinated, and Bennabi himself fled to Egypt after facing relentless harassment. Similarly, Cheikh Fodil El Ouartilani (BOURNAN, 2010, p: 37) narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in France and sought refuge in Egypt. Bensaï's experience mirrored that of many Algerian reformers whose progressive ideas threatened French colonial control. France recognized that a flourishing Muslim community would inevitably lead to Algeria's liberation from colonial domination and its collaborators.

Upon his return to Batna, Hamouda Bensaï lived a life defined by poverty and social isolation (GUESSOUM, 2015, p: 30). Working as a public clerk in a local café, he earned a modest living that allowed him to sustain his greatest passion: scholarly reading. Despite these humble circumstances, he maintained a steadfast dignity. In the 1980s, he experienced an intellectual resurgence, publishing the booklet *'For the Sake of My Faith, Dedicated to the Spirit of Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis'*. He also authored two significant articles: 'Let us honor the memory of Isabelle Eberhardt: adventurer of the beautiful sands', and 'Isabelle Eberhardt: the proud Persian who died in the prime of youth'.

His extensive correspondence during this era—with newspapers like El Rawasi, El Nasr, and El Mujahid—represents a vital cultural legacy. In a 1983 letter, he captured his sense of 'alienation' in his own land: "I am the son of Batna who has become a stranger in his own homeland—oppressed, insulted, and forsaken."

His intellect remained highly respected by peers and adversaries alike. Cheikh Bachir El Ibrahimî (BOUSAFSAF, 1996, p: 66) had once

foreseen this tragic trajectory, telling him: “Your heart is filled with sincere patriotism, and your situation moves me to tears. It is imperative to depart from this unfortunate nation. Despite your erudition, you are deficient in the art of demonization” (BEZIANE, 2009, p: 129).

Cheikh Abdurrahman Chiban also lauded him as a philosopher and a paramount scholar of his era. Hamouda Bensaï passed away on May 10th, 1998, and was interred in his native Batna, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual resistance.

Conclusion

Hamouda Bensaï remains a significant yet historically marginalized figure among the Algerian intelligentsia of the twentieth century. A product of the school of Cheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis, he drew upon the legacy of Islamic civilization and the profound exegesis of the Qur'an to challenge the French Orientalist establishment at its peak. At the Sorbonne, he was instrumental in dismantling the fallacies and misrepresentations directed at Islam and its followers.

His legacy extends beyond the academic; as a co-founder of the ‘Glorious North African Star’ (Étoile Nord-Africaine) and a leader within the North African Muslim Students Association, Bensaï stood as a staunch opponent of colonial policies aimed at proselytization, ‘Frenchification’, and cultural Westernization in North Africa. Even on French soil, he remained a tireless champion for the identity of Algeria, Islam, and Arabism.

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- KADDACHE Mahfoud (1973), *Images from the Life of Emir Khaled in His Youth*, *El Thaqafa Journal*, Issue 13.