

## INTERVENTION ON THE EXISTING HERITAGE - WHAT SOLUTIONS FOR MOROCCAN BUILT HERITAGE

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Rabat is considered one of the richest cities in heritage in Morocco. It has an architectural and urban heritage dating from the Roman period to the (experimental) intervention of the French protectorate administration.*

*In recent years, there has been an increasing number of interventions on heritage fabrics in Morocco, buildings are demolished to bring new buildings to the surface, others are supported without knowing how to approach them.*

*Yet voices are raised denouncing an irreversible loss of a singular patrimony. As a result of not being able to prevent demolition, associations preach to preserve the facade of these buildings. Thus, a new phenomenon is beginning to emerge, especially in the colonial centre of Rabat: façadism;*

*It consists of a total or partial demolition of the interior of buildings, and a reconstruction of new spaces, resulting in functional, structural, volumetric and even architectural deformations due to the constraint of “paste” a new plan to an existing facade, it has often been used for the siting of office buildings at the location of former residential buildings whose appearance is retained only, dissociated from the architectural design of which it was a part, and without consideration for the original interior creation or function of the building itself and its neighbourhood.*

*This reflection on façadism directs us to a re-reading of the problem of intervention on the “existing” as a radical solution and to ask ourselves about the future of this new “avatar” product promoting the outer envelope of the buildings independently of the plan.*

*It is indeed essential to dissect the concept and practice of façadism in Morocco in order to understand its interest as an architectural practice of intervention on the existing heritage.*

**KEYWORDS:** Colonial Creation, Existing Heritage, Architectural Styles, Facadism, Rabat, Morocco

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, we have witnessed more and more interventions on built heritage. Buildings are demolished to bring new buildings out, others are supported without knowing how to approach them (figure 1).



**Figure 1: Bessonneau Building Called Hotel Lincoln Casablanca, Photography Karima Berdouz 2019.**

Yet, voices, in this case association, rise, denouncing an irreversible loss of a singular patrimony, of which they cannot prevent the demolition, they then militate, as a last resort, for the preservation of the facade of these buildings. We have seen the appearance of a new phenomenon, particularly in the colonial centres of Casablanca and Rabat, which consists in the total or partial demolition of the interior of the buildings, and reconstruction of new spaces while maintaining the facade, sometimes with authorized elevation and a reconstruction of new spaces while maintaining the facade, sometimes with authorized elevation. This intervention results in functional, structural, volumetric and even architectural deformations.

This has often involved the conversion of residential buildings into office buildings. It is preserved only by the appearance, dissociated from the architectural design of which it was part, and without consideration of the original interior creation or the function of the building. Moreover, the elevation at the same, A project can be read retrospectively at several levels.

Architectural interventions on an existing building, whether superficial or deep, cause changes in the perception of the property. The mental image of the city is then disturbed in the collective identity of a community.

The first use of the term “facadism” was made of the Canadian Dinubumbaru in 1980. This neologism is composed of two words, "Facade" which is the outer face of a building or a set of surfaces that can be seen globally from the outside following a perpendicular axis centered, and "ism" which characterizes either an ideology, an established condition or behaviour. Therefore, we can say that facadism is an action on the heart of the building that keeps its outer envelope intact.

Although the operations carried out in Europe from the 1980s have provoked many reactions, Nevertheless, they are interesting to analyse as an action on the existing in favour of the conservation of the architectural heritage.

### **Heritage Conservation Under The Aegis of the French Protectorate in Morocco**

In 1912, Morocco signed a treaty with France establishing the Protectorate, the main concern of which was to protect the Cherifian Kingdom from the political and economic rivalries of the great colonial powers. This treaty guaranteed France a territory without division and prevented it from an imminent war with Germany.

Although the “pacification of Morocco” was the major strategic issue for Louis hubert Lyautey, General Resident in Morocco (1912–1925), he also began to reflect on the development of cities. His idea was that, through a regulated urbanism, he could ensure the safety of colonial military troops and limit the risks of urban revolt that Morocco had already faced a few years before.

Tocqueville was indignant as early as 1847: *«The indigenous cities were invaded, upset, destroyed by our administration even more than by our weapons»*. In this urban vision, the general resident appealed, then in 1913 to Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier, who proposed to him a rupture between the Arab city and the modern European city and this through the constitution of sanitary easements, and a plan of development based on cones of view on the great monuments.

Some time before, between 1887 and 1913 the French State passed laws on historical monuments: the law of 30 March 1887 for the conservation of monuments and art objects having a historical and archaeological interest, the Law of 21 April 1906 on the protection of natural sites and monuments of an artistic character, the Law of 31 December 1913 on the protection of historical monuments substituted for that of 1887 adding the notion of «public interest» to that of “national interest”. Still in force, this national awareness of natural and architectural historical monuments was passed on to the colonized territories for an experiment, in this case Morocco.

A legal and practical arsenal, concerning the protection of historical monuments on one side and alignments, development plans and easements on the other, was ready for use. The first piece of legislation relating to this question was the Cherifian dahir of November 26, 1912, concerning the protection of arts and historical monuments, considers that:

*“The ruins of ancient constructions prior to Islam, those of the Palaces of Our Predecessors, their enclosures and outbuildings, religious or profane monuments having a historical or artistic character..., are placed under the special supervision of the Maghzen which will ensure its conservation ».*

Two days later, Lyautey appointed Maurice Tranchant De Lunel, as the first curator of historical monuments and Imperial Palace, director of the Fine Arts DepartmentArts, antiques and historical monuments in order to preserve Moroccan monuments.

A set of laws specific to urban development were then linked, without specifying the method of conservation and intervention, it was mainly to further protect the “indigenous cities” and avoid any confrontation with the local population such as what happened in Algeria and Tunisia.

The peculiarity of these laws, drafted under the Protectorate’s tutelage, is that they protected the land and real estate of nationals possessing «Melk ». This specificity was contrary to the theories and practices in the French colonies where nationals were considered as mere occupants of the land without rights.

After independence, Morocco is experiencing a regulatory stagnation in terms of heritage protection. During the same period, in France, and with the arrival of the French Minister of Culture of the time André Malraux, a law was passed to give a new dimension to the protection and enhancement of heritage.

According to Malraux, it combines two imperatives: “conserve our architectural and historical heritage and improve the living and working conditions of French people”. It was a law that brought together heritage protection and urban planning legislation that defended “urban dynamics that build on the existing city”.

It is this dichotomy of this act that gives local action, in terms of heritage protection, flexibility in heritage management.

In Morocco, it was not until the 1980s that a law (no. 22-80 promulgated by the Dahir of 25 December 1980) on the conservation of historical monuments and sites, inscriptions, objects of art and antiques was passed. However, this law comes with shortcomings in comparison with that of Malraux, since it is subjective with legal prerogatives aimed at the "case by case" of buildings to be conserved without taking into consideration the urban landscape, or to propose procedures and methods of architectural and urban protection. This involved an unequal relationship between landowners and legislators.

In fact, this text remains broad and incomprehensible, not imposing the easements *not aedificandi*, *not altius* or the easements of aspect in order to protect the architectural style of the buildings to be conserved. These gaps were not filled by the Urban Planning Act of 1992, but on the contrary, this led to more complex and contradictory heritage management, because it blurred the lines in terms of taking over the heritage.

### **Safeguarding Heritage in the Test of Urban Planning**

In Morocco, the centralized colonial administrative legacy has lasted for several decades. The professionals involved in the construction of the city were seen as the executing arms of the vision of the central powers.

In fact, urban planning has been undermined because it has been confronted with a set of contradictions between the rigorous practice of the norms bequeathed by colonial administration and the practices of urban populations.

In 1981 and 1984, strong tensions and riots broke out in Casablanca. This delicate situation prompted the Ministry of the Interior to annex the Department of Urban Planning and to address these “urban ills” with the introduction of new urban reforms, by creating decentralized services, for local management based around Urban Agencies and Regional Planning Inspections.

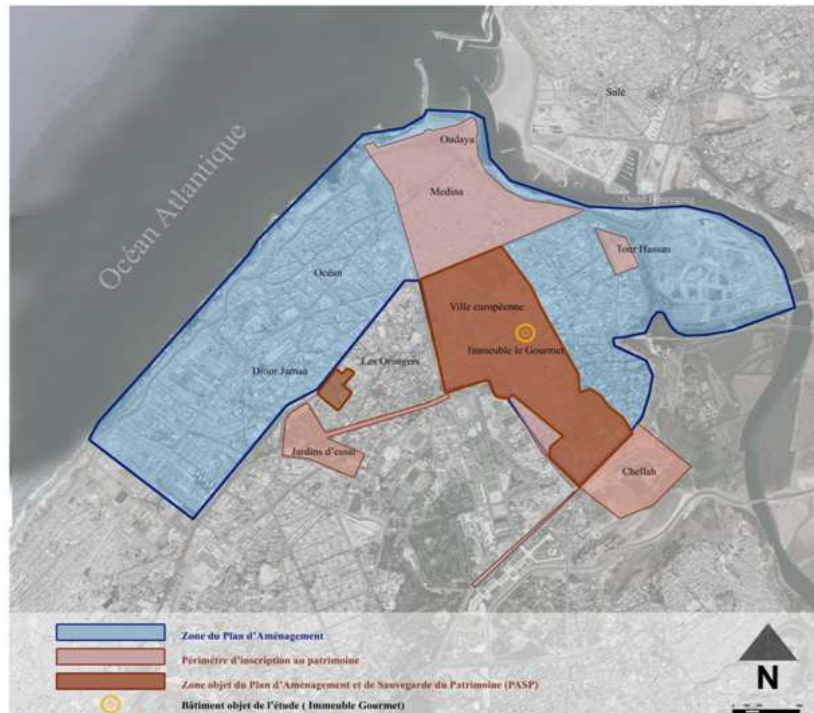
The instability and complexity of the legislative and institutional landscape has made it difficult to establish autonomous urban management and planning at local level, with several clashes between different local actors, like the Ministry of Housing and its bodies (Urban Agencies), the Ministry of the Interior (Communes), which issues building, elevation and new development permits.

This urban effervescence prompted a group of intellectuals at the end of the last century to reflect on the modern city as a heritage heritage. Civil society under the status of heritage conservation association, takes the lead as a local actor who can intervene at senior levels to block or guide a decision taken by the decentralised services on urban management.

The example of Casamémoire, a Moroccan non-profit association dedicated to safeguarding the architectural heritage of the 20th century in Morocco, was born in 1995 following the demolition of the «villa El Mokri» of the architect Marius Boyer in Casablanca, it brings together a group of intellectuals: architects, teachers, journalists.

19 years later, Rabat follows the example of Casablanca with the creation of the Rabat-Salé association, a memory of the day after UNESCO declared Rabat a World Heritage site in 2012. Its mission is to defend the architectural and urban heritage of Rabat and Salé.

This architectural and urban protection covered part of the modern centre of Rabat, the medina and a set of monuments including Chellah, the Oudayas and the walls of Rabat. Paradoxically, this classification is confronted with an aging urban legislation: a layout plan dating from 1999 which entitles to a functional and architectural change and whose essential prerogatives are new constructions (figure 2).



**Figure 2 : Layering Scheme of the Urban Development Plan and the Town of Rabat's Backup Plan - Municipality of Hassan.**

In addition, since the 2000s, several backup plans have been launched. Without a legal basis, they are not enforceable against third parties and are therefore not enforceable in the field.

The city then confronts itself with a town planning regulation carrying contradictions. It projects urban densification in an area designated as a “safe zone”, thereby implicitly exposing property classified as a demolition risk.

### **Facadism in Morocco, Case of the Gourmet Building in Rabat**

The building «the gourmet» proposed for classification by the plan of safeguard and enhancement of the modern center of the city of Rabat is a beautiful illustration of this problem of safeguard by facadism.

Designed in 1920 by Architect Hippolyte-Joseph Delaporte (1875 – 1962), it is located in Place Al Joulane in downtown Rabat (figure3).



**Figure 3: «The Gourmet» Building, after the Rise of 2001. Clichet Karima BERDOUZ, 2018, Rabat.**

This building had several functions during its first 100 years of life. Its initial function was mainly to provide housing for the French who came to settle in Morocco at the beginning of the Protectorate. It takes its name from a bakery and tea room called “the gourmet” which was installed on the ground floor and which no longer exists, since its transformation into an office tray.

During the Second World War, between 1939 and 1945, Morocco engaged with France in this war, experienced a slowdown in the construction of infrastructure. A return of epidemics (cholera, influenza, etc.) will trigger a health crisis, and Morocco will suffer from a lack of hospital infrastructure. The "le gourmet" building will be given a new function, which is that of a clinic for the French.

After independence, the building «the gourmet» resumed its initial function as a residential building, with great interest in its inhabitants, the Moroccans replaced French repatriated in Hexagon.

In the late 1990s, the “gourmet” building was transferred to a new owner who wanted to build a five-storey hotel and demolish the building.

Wanting to assert the prerogatives of the development plan which gave him the possibility of having an R+5 on his building, this new owner filed a project in this direction, but was refused permission to build by the planning services for non-compliance with the safeguard zone. The City Planning Inspectorate, the Urban Agency, the Municipality of Rabat – Hassan and the landlord joined forces to give legal interpretation. The owner was forced to sell this property.

It was bought by new owners who acquired it, knowing beforehand the constraints associated with the building. They then proposed a raised solution while keeping the same style of the existing façade.

Several meetings and several months of consultation ended up with the granting of a licence to raise the same level of four floors instead of the five requested.

The walls of the "gourmet" building, which were in an advanced state of disrepair, urged the owners with the assistance of the Architect in charge of the Study of Elevation and Local Engineering Office, to opt for a solution, already experienced in Europe «facadism». They proposed to the planning committee responsible for granting the building permit, based on technical reports on the stability of the building, a new solution: «facadism».(figure 4)



**Figure 4: Example of Façadism: Building of the General Society in Casablanca Shoring Works, Photo Taken by Ibtissam Kourdou. 2013.**

This new attempt was conclusive, as they were able to arrive a final decision on an authorisation for reconstruction with an increasingly recessed floor, as compensation for the costs incurred in maintaining the existing façade. (Figure 5)

For us, this example is a concrete illustration of the legal duality caused by the development plan and the safeguard plan in which it is written. Since this building is in a decreed backup area is where paradoxically the elevation is allowed without specifying the modalities of the elevation and backup compromise.

Elevation with identical facade  
2001

Initial facade preserved by the façadism  
process 1920



**Figure 5: Schematic Illustrating the Intervention of Façadism on the Building «Le Gourmet», Rabat. Karima BERDOUZ, 2018.**

This operation was the first in Morocco to implement the concept of facadism. The solution of applying it on the first three levels, was adopted as an intermediate and compromise approach between the owner and the city. This difficult and costly act was received in a mixed manner by the intellectual world, but rather by the population. From that moment on, the Rabat-Salé Urban Agency began to propose de facto, at every request to rebuild in the safeguard zone, to opt for «facadism» as an operating tool in order to preserve the façade. Some examples were not always successful in the city centre of Rabat and Casablanca.

For the building «the gourmet», we observed that preservation was done only on the façade, All the architectural elements found in the building, were sacrificed for its new functionality. The building moved from a residential building to an office use building. The elevation of the three levels participated in the process of “heritage mythification” giving the disenfranchised population its heritage, a falsely true image of the building.

Currently, in Morocco, facadism, as an operational tool, is not framed by specific legislative texts, it is often subject to multiple or contradictory legal interpretations. It is being debated by heritage architects who are challenging its implementation as a precautionary solution. The approach of safeguarding, conservation, restoration or rehabilitation on domestic buildings not being considered as a regulated action, except on some restorations of classified monuments, finds in the facadism a solution for the maintenance of a heritage facade image!

Nevertheless, since 2010, a national upheaval, due to the authorities' interest in heritage, often driven by civil society, has led to the creation of conservation and development plans, and a diploma in heritage at the National School of Architecture in Rabat, giving the title of heritage architect. This new approach to the wider heritage, which no longer stops only at the monument, has given hope for its taking over, in the years to come, For until now, only a few intellectuals and initiates were campaigning for his protection.

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