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URBAN REHABILITATION OF THE CITY CENTER OF ORAN (ALGERIA): A RECONCILIATION WITH THE COLONIAL HERITAGE?

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ABSTRACT

This research paper delves into the emerging interest in heritage preservation concerning the rehabilitation of buildings inherited from the colonial era in the city center of Oran. It addresses several key aspects: an examination of the urban history of Oran and the development of its city center, tracing the architectural and urban planning movements that have influenced it. Particularly, it explores the reappropriation of spaces following Algeria's independence in 1962, marked by the significant exodus of the European population and the subsequent implementation of a rental system managed by a public entity, the Office of Promotion and Real Estate Management. A postcolonial retrospective allows for an analysis of the degradation resulting from this management approach and the subsequent deterioration of buildings since the full transfer of ownership of these "State Assets" in 1981. The initial diagnosis, conducted in 2008, emphasizes the urgency for public intervention and justifies the subsequent rehabilitation efforts.

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Introduction.

The Algerian public authorities have recently shown a dual interest in the architectural and urban planning legacy of the colonial city, particularly its central areas. This interest stems firstly from a belated recognition of its heritage value and secondly, due to the significant deterioration it has suffered, jeopardizing its preservation and eroding the collective memory associated with the city. Indeed, the value of this heritage remained largely overlooked in both individual and collective memory, primarily because it was linked to a period of intense socio-residential segregation. During this time, the Algerian community was confined to so-called "Muslim" neighborhoods, excluded from European areas and especially from the city center, which was predominantly built by and for the European population residing in Oran.

While the buildings constructed during the colonial era were not originally intended for today's Algerian city dwellers, they were appropriated after independence in 1962 as symbols of spaces to be reclaimed. However, little attention was paid to their heritage significance at the time, except for the symbolic value they held in reclaiming previously inaccessible spaces.

The present paper aims to explore whether or not “a reconciliation” with the heritage of the city center built since the colonial period can be envisaged. It also examines how rehabilitation operations carried out since 1990 attest (or not) to this purpose by favoring certain neighborhoods rather than others to be saved and in which specific buildings are selected to be rehabilitated. Moreover, the study attempts to identify private and public actors involved in a process which seems to be similar to an unstated purpose to elevate central places' heritage to the status of heritage maintained and preserved for future generations.

Addressing this question enables us to discern whether this process represents a novel approach to preserving certain facets of the city inherited from the colonial era, particularly its central spaces. These facets are regarded as relics of urban planning and architectural movements imbued with significant heritage value, serving as testament to a shared memory of a colonial occupation spanning 132 years. It is noteworthy that since independence, the city has experienced substantial expansion and densification.

Furthermore, we aim to explore the connection between the rehabilitation and reappropriation of colonial heritage, albeit with limited participation from inhabitants due to the predominant role of public authorities in executing and predominantly financing such endeavors via public funds. Civil society, primarily represented by associative movements, plays only a marginal role. This trajectory of the discourse aligns seamlessly with the recommendations outlined in the "International Charter for the Safeguarding of Historic Cities," advocating for the coexistence rather than the dichotomy of colonial and post-independence urban elements, as articulated by G. Mercier (1998). According to Mercier, "this principle has inspired most of the laws which, almost everywhere on the planet, govern the protection of urban areas for heritage purposes."

In the subsequent section, researchers delve into the urban history of Oran, particularly focusing on the formation of its city center.

1. Oran's Urban History: The Genesis of the City Center.

A brief retrospective underscores that Oran, established in the early 10th century, witnessed successive external influences: Spanish (1509-1708) and (1732-1792), intermittently punctuated by Turkish presences (1708-1732) and (1792-1830), culminating in French colonization spanning 132 years (1830-1962).

The Spanish dominion over Oran endured the longest, extending over two centuries commencing on May 19, 1509, with a concentrated focus on the lower city and its immediate environs. The Spanish presence in Oran was initially motivated by the strategic imperative of fortifying their position against potential threats posed by the Turks and their Arab allies.

What imprint did the Spanish era leave on the city's architectural landscape and its central precincts? Upon their arrival, the Spaniards encountered a modest settlement nestled between the Ras El Aïn ravine and Mount Murdjadjo to the northwest. Here, they erected a network of fortifications to consolidate their foothold and shield themselves from external incursions originating from the south, west, or east. At the heart of these defensive installations lay a cluster of public, military, and religious structures encircling the old town, its nucleus encased within walls that the Spanish called *Alcazaba* (Casbah or citadel).

The city's access points were meticulously fortified, encompassing the Tower of Saint Dominique, and the gates of Canastel, Tlemcen, and Santon. Interestingly, the latter, although termed a gate, functioned more as an outpost, integral to a larger port protected by the "barrera," a defensive barrier against invasions (Pestemaldjoglou, 1936). This defensive network was further fortified by a series of forts including Lamoune, Santa Cruz, Saint Grégoire, and Santiago. Beyond the ravine, additional fortifications safeguarded the city, with the primary stronghold being the fort of Rosalcazar (Mekibus, 1983), complemented by forts such as Saint Philippe, Saint André, Saint Ferdinand, Saint Charles, and Saint Michel. The devastating earthquake of October 1790, claiming 3000 lives and decimating much of the old town alongside numerous public, military, and religious structures erected

by the Spaniards, inflicted a profound trauma, erasing from memory identity of edifices of significant heritage value.

Despite efforts to preserve remnants of this heritage, on-site observations reveal a lamentable state of advanced decay dating back to both the Spanish and Ottoman periods. While the opening of Rosalcazar (the site of Château Neuf) to the public and the Palais du Bey, constructed during the Ottoman era, are causes for celebration, the tardiness of restoration efforts is regrettable. Unfortunately, irreversible errors have “violated” the “Château Neuf” site. They are epitomized by the encroachment of multi-story concrete structures within the walls. The people of Oran, even those who launched campaigns for the defense of urban heritage, quite rightly termed this extremely serious error, as “the wart”.

Moreover, the Marinid dungeons, relics from the 14th-century Arab-Berber Dynasty, located near the Bey Palace, suffer from neglect, with their towers adorned with modern parabolic antennas. Although Fort Santa Cruz, situated atop the Murdjadjo heights, has been accessible to the public for only a brief period, reaching it remains precarious and unfeasible via public transport.

The Spanish Forts of Saint Philippe and Saint André still remain occupied. The Old Town, empty of its squatters, is in ruins, and its doors closed by concrete block walls. The expressway that connects the Lower Quarters to the Tlemcen road, while improving traffic flow, poses a significant threat to Sidi El Houari, which is in need of comprehensive rehabilitation. It also isolates the Tambour Saint José, which provides access to the underground galleries linking the main Spanish fortifications. These galleries could benefit from maintenance and reactivation once the Spanish fortifications are cleared and opened to the public.

The district known as "La Calère," (PDAU, 2018) or "Calera" in Spanish, was completely demolished by administrative decision, despite its commanding view of the Oran fishery. It had the potential to rival the old Spanish centers owing to its urban layout, which followed the layered topography. This layout featured numerous staircases connecting different levels, leading to small squares, and fostering unique urban atmospheres that facilitated social interactions within the neighborhood. In the 2000s, an architectural competition was held, indicating an acknowledgment of the need for rehabilitation in line with the original model inspired by its initial urban design, reminiscent of the stepped topographies of Mediterranean cities. However, this concept was swiftly abandoned in favor of an uninspired solution: an urban forest on the hills overlooking the port of Oran. Now, let's consider the future development of old Oran under French colonization.

2. The new centrality: urban design and architectural production.

The emergence of Oran's new centrality is exemplified by two notable works: the Architectural Guide of Oran¹ (1986) and a guide to the city's historical monuments and natural sites (Métaïr, 2007). These documents complement the earlier work of René Lespès (2003), shedding light on the richness of inherited urban heritage, particularly that which was formed around the production of the new centrality at the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th. The aim of these three architectural guides is to highlight Oran's architectural richness by cataloging and describing buildings and structures chronologically, spanning from Spanish and Turkish influences to the architectural styles introduced during French occupation (including those of Napoleon III, Art Nouveau, and Modern Architecture). Kouider Métaïr's *Guide* deviates from the chronology established by the previous authors and makes a more thematic and well-conducted entry: religious edifices, fortifications, places and remarkable buildings. The convictions and militant act for heritage issues quite easily explain the choice of the President of the Bel Horizon Association.

René Lespès' detailed description remains essential for anyone who wishes to unfold the different phases of the construction of the City, while overlooking the marginalization of the majority of Algerians in the establishing and using central spaces. Oran's centrality aligns with the construction and organization of central spaces seen in numerous French cities during the same period. Architectural styles of the time influenced its development, with occasional nods to Moorish aesthetics and style. The work of these three architects facilitated a reevaluation of the architectural styles prevalent in the colonial city center, which represent a blend of revivals and reinterpretations

¹ The initiative was championed by three architecture educators: Nicolas Chambon, Denis Grandet, and Gilles Marchand.

of past styles, such as neo-classicism, Italian Neo-Renaissance, and French classicism of the 17th century (Souiah and Hadaoui, 2015).

In the constructions of the early 19th century, we can sometimes recognize blending elements from the medieval, neo-Gothic periods or from older non-European civilizations: neo-Moorish or neo-Babylonian styles. It is eclecticism which breaks the more homogeneous styles of the more contemporary period. For instance, the Sacré Cœur Cathedral, situated on Place Jeanne d'Arc, in the city center, built in 1913, reflects a neo-Byzantine style with its grand vaulted porch made of bricks, decorated with mosaics, and flanked by two square towers topped with pyramidal caps. It is accessed by an imposing staircase.

Another notable structure, located at the corner of rue Mounzar (des Sœurs Benslimane), evokes a fusion of Gothic and Renaissance styles. Meanwhile, a building at the intersection of rue Alsace-Lorraine (Rue Khémisti) and rue de la Paix, currently housing the Crédit Populaire Algérien (CPA) bank, recalls Parisian architectural elements of the second half of the 19th century. The originality also lies in the introduction of the Moorish style, visible in its arcades of the ground floor, window designs, and the traditional dome which caps the tower.



*Figure 4. Moorish-inspired style at the angle of Rue de la Paix and Alsace –Lorraine (Khemisti).
Source: Author*

Different architectural styles are present in the city center of Oran, yet many buildings suffer from severe degradation. It is imperative to conduct a comprehensive inventory and propose a plan for safeguarding and rehabilitating this immovable heritage.

3. Diagnosing the Deterioration of Buildings in the City of Oran.

Managing buildings inherited from the colonial period after the mass departure of Europeans following the Algerian Independence proved to be a challenging and sensitive task. Establishing the Office of Promotion and Real Estate Management (OPGI) was necessary to address illegal occupations and manage them under a rental system for what was formerly termed "Vacant Property" or "State Property." However, not all properties were subject to rental agreements; the Algerian bourgeoisie engaged in low-cost real estate transactions, acquiring buildings from departing Europeans. It was only in 1981 that a law was enacted to transfer full ownership of these real estate properties to previous tenants, after estimating their values and disregarding specifications for managing the common areas in collective or rental buildings, particularly those in the city center. This neglect accelerated the deterioration of inherited heritage, prompting public authorities to initiate remedy through rehabilitation operations four decades after the enactment of the law on State Property transfer.

Indeed, the full ownership transfer of apartments in large buildings has overlooked the management of common areas (stairwells, terraces, elevators) and the preservation of facades facing major commercial streets (such as the "bars" of windows and balconies in discordance with the wrought iron of the affluent colonial-era buildings, balconies adorned with satellite dishes, tiling and flooring that make the ground-floor shop windows more appealing). This situation has seriously compromised

the inherited urban heritage in terms of its external aspects, common areas, and even its terraces or cellars, some of which were squatted in.

In 1990, OPGI launched a study, "Rehabilitation of Old Buildings," using its own funds to evaluate the feasibility and cost of rehabilitating buildings under its management in Oran and for which it had granted ownership of the apartments. The aim was to evaluate the cost of such an operation in order to find funding sources and register it in the form of a program authorization (PA). 24 buildings were the subject of the investigation. They were taken from the old core (Sid El Houari) and the formerly European (Saint Pierre, Saint Antoine, Boulanger, Eckmühl, city center) and Jewish (Derb) neighborhoods. This sample of buildings allowed a good evaluation of the rehabilitation work, whether heavy, medium or light. This is how in 1995, an operation was carried out, financed by a loan from the Caisse Nationale d'Épargne et de Prévoyance (CNEP). This loan made it possible to commence the rehabilitation of 33 buildings spread across seven districts of the city of Oran, the majority of which are former European districts, only the Médioni district is part of the Muslim districts of the colonial period. It should be noted that the buildings selected for rehabilitation had to serve three functions: strictly residential, residential coupled with commercial activities, and finally an administrative destination (OPGI headquarters, Justice, ANSEJ)¹.

A report of the OPGI² dating 2008 indicates that many rehabilitated buildings remained unoccupied, leading OPGI to put them up for sale once the rehabilitation was carried out. This was the start of a gentrification process that should be analyzed in more depth. In 1997, an Algerian-German cooperation was done aiming at the rehabilitation of the construction perimeter and urban restructuring (RU/RCB)³, and large housing complexes emerged, thanks to different sources of financing depending on the type of operations achieved. For the intervention on the exterior spaces, consent was given for the treatment of the sanitation networks, completing the roads, and reconfiguring the exterior spaces of the large complexes (Louz Neighbourhood/Amandiers and Cité Perret which adjoins the Wilaya of Oran⁴).

The construction perimeter required multiple financing contributions:

- 40% comes from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHU) supplying the National Housing Fund (FONAL).
- 40% of the finance comes from the participation of the Wilaya of Oran, amount taken from the Housing Tax.
- 20% of the finance is made up of the participation of the beneficiary-co-owner.

This operation concerned 1500 housing units in the large complexes mentioned above. The initial phase targeted 1016 homes, leaving the remaining units for a subsequent phase. In 2003, another rehabilitation endeavor addressed 5000 dwellings, focusing on refurbishing common areas. Ministerial funding was allocated to the OPGI to facilitate waterproofing, repair of pipe systems, and cellar maintenance. This initiative encompassed 23 collective housing estates, such as Cité Jean Lafontaine, Plein Ciel, Antinéa, Cité Jean d'Arc, and Résidence Leclerc, etc. It wasn't until 2007 that overarching objectives for rehabilitating the urban fabric of major cities (Algiers, Oran, Constantine, and Annaba) were defined at the central level. Notably, structures dating back to pre-colonial and colonial periods require heightened attention due to pronounced degradation, often posing risks to occupants. This marked the onset of a strategic approach by central authorities, informed by observations of urban fabric within major cities.

The diagnosis made it possible to classify the constructions into different sections:

- Buildings Threatening Ruin (BTR)
- Buildings that require reinforcement of their structures (through actions depending on the different degrees of dilapidation).
- Healthy buildings that do not require major work.

With regard to the buildings to be rehabilitated, three degrees are defined as follows:

¹ ANSEJ (National Agency for Youth Employment Support)

² A typewritten text dated 2008 outlines the status of historic buildings in Oran and the intervention efforts undertaken by OPGI (Office de Promotion et de Gestion Immobilière) as part of the rehabilitation (p. 24).

³ A summary report of the operations carried out by DDPIFR formerly DRCB (the Department of Development of Real Estate and Land Promotion and Rehabilitation) formerly (the Department of Rehabilitation of the Construction Perimeter Environment)

⁴ The Prefecture of Oran serves as the administrative headquarters.

- **Degree 1:** very advanced deterioration which requires a total evacuation of the occupants in order to carry out a more in-depth assessment either to completely demolish or undertake major rehabilitation.
- **Degree 2:** Requiring partial evacuation of the occupants for the recovery of the floors.
- **Degree 3:** A lighter intervention is carried out without the evacuation of families because only the common areas are treated.

In the case of Oran, expertise was conducted on a housing stock estimated at 54,500 units. Over a span of seven years (2007-2014), 23,963 homes were evaluated, representing 45% of the initially planned total. The city of Oran was divided into six priority sectors (Lot 1 to Lot 6), with the majority of appraised housing falling under Lot 1 (comprising the old Sid El Houari core and city center, with the addition of El Hamri) and Lot 2 (encompassing Sananès, Saint Antoine, and Medina Jdida). Notably, the prioritized sectors included the old core, the city center, and the pericentral districts, with the peripheral El Hamri district completing the priority housing stock for assessment. Consequently, urgent action was required to initiate rehabilitation operations to preserve this urban and architectural heritage.

Abdelwahid Temmar (2008) emphasizes the necessity of prioritizing such operations in major urban metropolises like Algiers, Oran, Annaba, and Constantine. In 2010, a decision by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning¹ officially endorsed this choice by allocating financial resources for the rehabilitation of old buildings in large metropolises. In this context, thorough investigations were necessary to accurately assess the condition of buildings and prioritize those in need of immediate attention.

4. Urban rehabilitation in Oran: a particular interest for the city center.

Upon the request of the Wali², the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning allocated funds for the rehabilitation of 200 buildings³, comprising 1705 housing units in Oran. The central districts were divided into three zones⁴, further segmented into sub-zones, and this operation was entrusted to six design offices for "Studies and Monitoring." However, it should be noted that this operation is being carried out as project owner by the Department of Urban Planning and Construction and as delegated project owner by OPGI⁵. Two-headed management structure involving both OPGI and the Department of Urban Planning and Construction led to operational dysfunctions and low completion rates. The construction companies are national and there are numerous construction site delays and contract terminations.

A comprehensive diagnosis was conducted for the "Rehabilitation of 200 buildings" operation, with an emphasis on treating buildings located on main boulevards of the city center (Larbi Ben M'hidi ex-road d'Arzew, road Khémisti formerly Alsace Lorraine, Boulevard Maata formerly Maréchal Foch) and the old core (Boulevard Khédim Mustapha formerly Stalingrad). Although the implementation rate is low (59 buildings out of 200, or approximately 30%), (the work carried out emphasizes the recovery of buildings with a view to preserving urban heritage. Indeed, several actions are carried out on buildings by contracting enterprises, including roof work to prevent rainwater infiltration, treatments of facade (masonry, old ironwork, carpentry, cornices and balconies), and improvements to common areas: stairwells, elevators and interior courtyards.

However, in privately-owned buildings, only facade treatments were ensured, leaving waterproofing and common area improvements to the owners' responsibility. Only 15 buildings received complete treatment (roof, facade, and common areas), while facade renovations were carried out on 44 buildings, some of which were co-owned (31) or fully owned (13). Unfortunately, 31 out of the 44 buildings underwent only facade renovations, despite the necessity for comprehensive work including roofs and common areas. Budgetary issues were cited by the concerned services, even though the allocated budget for each building was set at 3.5 million DA according to specifications.

¹Ministerial decision n°2198

²Prefect

³Decision of 26/11/2008, n°61 bearing operation number 57229.262.131.09.1 registered in 2007.

⁴ An Annex to the Decision of the General Secretary (SG) of the Wilaya of Oran n°04, relating to the management of the program for the rehabilitation of 200 buildings in Oran, overseen by OPGI, dated 03/08/2008.

⁵ Decision of the SG of the Wilaya of Oran n°04, relating to the management of the rehabilitation program of 200 buildings in Oran by the OPGI, dated 03/08/2008.

As of 2019, the status allows an assessment of the budget consumption allocated for this operation. Out of the initially planned 200 buildings, only 59 have been treated, leaving 141 buildings awaiting work completion.

A steering committee was established comprising various institutions and stakeholders: OPGI, Department of Urban Planning, Chamber of Commerce, APC¹ (Mairie), Department of Transport, Sonelgaz, Urban Police, and Seor (Water Management and Distribution Agency).

Additionally, an additional operation launched in 2008² aimed to rehabilitate 400 buildings throughout the Wilaya of Oran. Similar actions as those undertaken for the 200 buildings operation were employed, focusing on facades, common areas, and waterproofing. Four zones were identified:

Zone 01 (City center): 250 buildings located along the main axes of the center (Larbi Ben M'hidi, and Khémisti as well as the axes which connect them, Boulevard de la Soummam (Ex Magenta), Rue du 20 Août (formerly Vieille Mosquée).

Zone 02 (Boulevard Maata): only three buildings are retained in this zone.

Zone 03 (Sid El Bachir ex Le Plateau): 107 buildings on the main roads of this pericentral district, including Boulevard Bendjerzeb (formerly Sébastopol), Didouche Mourad (formerly Fulton), Adda Benaouda (formerly Hypolite Giraud).

Two other zones (04 and 05) were chosen outside the city of Oran. These zones contain 31 buildings in Mers El Kébir (Zone 04) and 9 buildings in Arzew (Zone 05). Both areas belong to the maritime fringe. In 2019, only 8 buildings in the city center of Oran were treated as part of this operation, despite specifications detailing the sites and the number of buildings to be addressed in the initial phase. Here too the two-headed control (OPGI and DUC) hindered smooth operation.

However, management restructuring promises change: each organization now oversees specific operations. Consequently, the DUC assumes responsibility for the aforementioned operations (200 and 400 buildings) exclusively, given substantial budgets yet to be utilized. Additionally, a complementary operation initiated in 2012 to rehabilitate old buildings has been added to the DUC's portfolio. Initially, this operation aimed to address buildings in five lots: Lot 1 (a single building on Rue Khémisti), Lot 2 (the Directorate of Mujahideen - Veterans building on Adda Gherbi Street), Lot 3 (the commerce room on Boulevard La Soummam), Lot 4 (City Hall), and Lot 5 (United States Consulate).

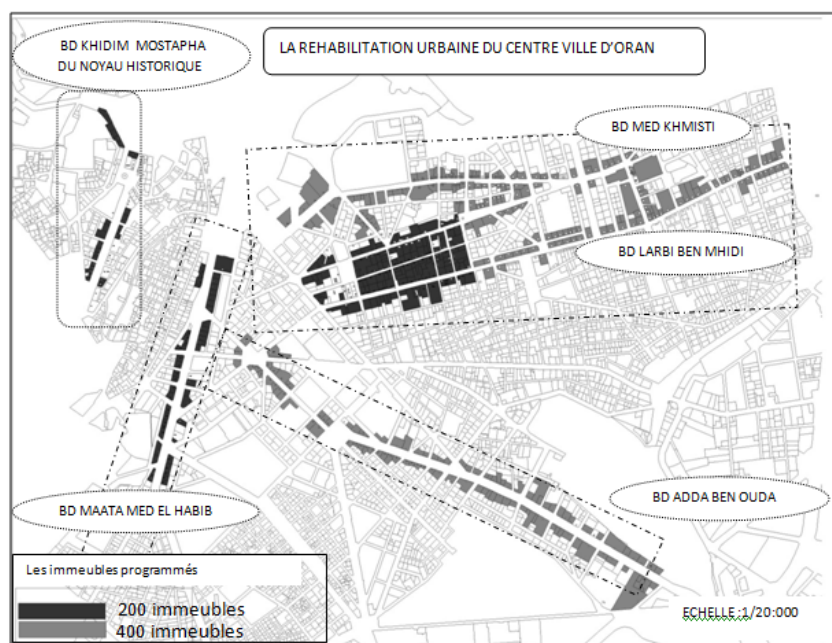


Figure 5. Urban rehabilitation operations for 200 and 400 buildings in the City Center of Oran (planned).

¹Communal Popular Assembly

² Decision of 26-11-2008, operation n°57229 .131.08.01

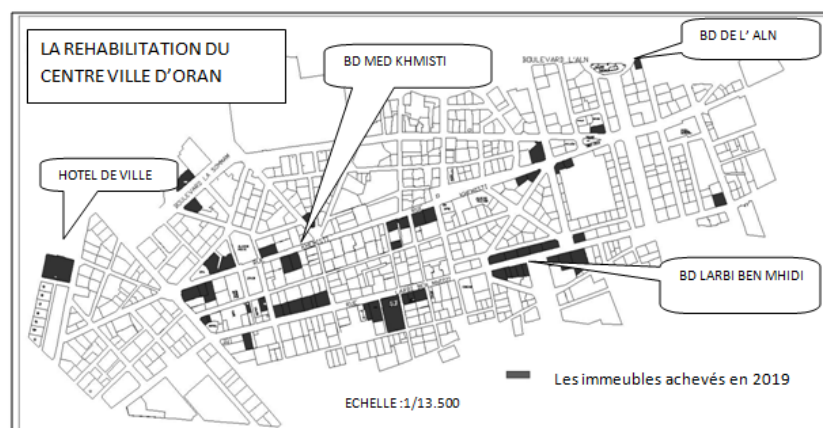


Figure 6. The buildings of the City Center of Oran in which rehabilitation has been achieved.



Figure 7. Chamber of Commerce (Boulevard de la Soummam, Oran) after the Rehabilitation.
Source: Author.

For OPGI, two operations, each worth one billion DA, have been entrusted to it. This funding originates from the National Housing Fund (FONAL) and is managed by the Caisse Nationale du Logement (CNL). The first operation, registered in 2014, was initially designated for the rehabilitation of the Hamri district but was redirected to focus on buildings along major axes in the city center, thereby diverting efforts away from a working-class district towards buildings inherited from the colonial period. Similarly, the second operation, also registered in 2014, is exclusively aimed at rehabilitating old buildings in downtown Oran. These two operations are consolidated and commonly referred to as the "Rehabilitation of the old building 2x1 billion DA," given that the city center is the sole target for the work, and coordination is managed by a single organization, the OPGI. Upon registration, 48 buildings along the most prominent boulevards of the city center were selected: 29 along the Larbi Ben Mhidi axis and 19 along Khémisti Street.¹ Currently, 35 buildings have undergone treatment, all of which are in co-ownership and thus have received comprehensive treatments including facade renovations, improvements to common areas, and waterproofing.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, this analysis is juxtaposed with research on "urban policies in the Mediterranean," conducted by the UMR Telemme of the MMSH of Aix-En-Provence, and particularly based on the introductory synthesis by Nicole Girard (2003), to provide insights into the recent rehabilitation processes of buildings in the city center of Oran (Algeria) inherited from the French occupation. Referencing this work also facilitates introducing a comparative dimension on the Mediterranean scale, aiming to identify consistencies or singularities in urban policies directed towards heritage development.

¹Decision n°605 of 04/02/2014, from the Wilaya of Oran.

The observed consistencies relate to efforts to reconcile with colonial heritage and the imperative to preserve it, albeit often implicitly rather than explicitly articulated. Conversely, unique aspects pertain to the varied redirections of efforts towards favoring the city center, a legacy of colonization. Thus, the process of rehabilitating buildings in downtown Oran adheres to two recurring standards in urban policy: cultural and heritage references.

Culturally, the promotion of European-origin buildings in present-day North African cities, largely stripped of their original social fabric post-independence, underscores a desire to “reconcile” with a fraught past characterized by exclusions. Despite enduring traces of architectural and urban planning movements, the endeavor aims at both “symbolic and economic” heritage enhancement within the collective imagination of the current social component. A study on Casablanca's "heritage reconciliation as an issue of urban identity" by Raffaella Cattedra (2003) sheds light on a comparable North African port city and regional metropolis, which can be easily compared to the situation in Oran. Although Casablanca's urban history does not delve as deep as Oran's due to its inception during the French Protectorate in Morocco, both cities share centralities devoid of significant heritage pre-dating the French occupation, apart from the presence of Spanish buildings (Rosalcazar) and Turkish elements (the Bey's palace, the Mosque of Pasha, the Turkish baths and the Jewish quarter, El Derb) in Oran. These two cities therefore have centralities which were built in Modernity.

Cattedra's work on Casablanca appears entirely transposable to the case of Oran as far as the city center is concerned. Indeed, central places inherited from the colonial era seem to have acquired substantial economic and heritage added value in recent years. Thus, interventions on objects in the urban fabric of city centers typically take on an architectural nature. The colonial urban building is revisited in order to construct a heritage narrative, preserving the memory of the “other” - the European element by forging a new image of the city. This process entails a reappropriation of a complex past, despite its association with painful socio-residential segregation for the indigenous populace.

Notably, associative movements like CasaMémoire for Casablanca and Bel Horizon in Oran play pivotal roles, that should not be neglected, in safeguarding heritage and championing the recognition of these inherited central places as "witnesses of 20th-century architecture," with beautiful buildings, housing vibrant commercial and cultural activities on their ground floors. Moreover, works such as Sadek Benkadda's (2004) contribute to promoting the architectural heritage inherited from the colonial period. Thus, efforts to reinforce the significance of preserving urbanized spaces, culturally reappropriating them, and enhancing them through rehabilitation endeavors contribute to safeguarding the city's memory within the framework of a “shared memory” (Ousmane Mbaye, 2009), or a historical consciousness, where the colonial legacies of both the occupier and the occupied intersect, particularly in producing urban spaces. This is certainly what Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (2006) attempts to emphasize with regard to African cities: “The reappropriation of the colonial city (and its heritage) by African city dwellers, who indeed make it, despite Western denials, their city”. This notion aligns with the perspective articulated by Nicolas Bancel et al. (2010), emphasizing that “the challenge in post-colonial studies is precisely to move away from a linear reading of history, to consider the post as a “beyond,” a radical rupture which opens onto the construction of 'another relationship to the past....” The idea is to interpret urban landscapes that detach themselves from both the colonial prism and the hesitations of decolonized states in dealing with the question of colonial legacies, and even more so in granting them any heritage value. This approach feeds into the issue of "shared or mixed common heritage," fostering openness, solidarity, and cooperation among countries that have shared significant periods of their history.¹

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¹ Note, in recent years, some buildings in the colonial center have undergone restoration-rehabilitation facilitated by Spanish and Italian companies. These initiatives have also provided opportunities for young Algerians to gain experience in restoration and heritage preservation professions.

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