

# **AUTHENTICITY AND HERITAGE VALUES IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE: THE LOCAL IDENTITY OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PROJECT IN ALGIERS**

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## **1. Introduction**

Today, if there is a consensus on the need to recognise, preserve and transmit heritage in Algeria, the discussion on its inclusion in contemporary projects is still relevant. The present work is research that takes a new approach to the question of authenticity and heritage values through its use in the debates and practices of contemporary architecture. According to I. Benjemia, architecture builds, produces and translates identity [1]. How can we reinterpret the values that make up the authenticity of our heritage and integrate them in a relevant and innovative way into contemporary architectural projects with the aim of contributing to the construction and expression of our collective identity?

This work aims to demonstrate that the search for greater differentiation and visibility in architectural production could be built through knowledge, recognition, re-interpretation and integration of the values of our historical architectural heritage in new projects. This vision led us to choose the analysis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters project as a model for the development of our research. The architects, Abdelhalim Faïdi and Elias Bouchama, designed the project, which was inaugurated in 2011, using values from our local architectural heritage<sup>1</sup>. The aim is to understand the motivations of these architects for this conceptual choice, by placing it in its historical, political and architectural context to understand the way in which they reinterpreted and then integrated these values into its design.

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## 2. Method

The methodological approach adopted is based on three different approaches.

- *First:* The definition of the concept of authenticity and heritage values. Interest in this concept arose from previous research [2], in which it was studied as a means of assessment with a view to possible heritage classification. In the present work, we will approach it through its capacity to serve as a reference for contemporary architectural projects. The concepts of identity and contemporaneity will also be defined.
- *Second:* The development of an analysis grid based on the intersection of the work of Randal Mason [3], Philippe Genestier [4] and Leïla Ammar [5]. This grid will allow an analysis of the case study to be made so as to better understand the process used by architects to reinterpret heritage values in contemporary projects.
- *Third:* Investigating the relevance of this grid applied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Headquarters project as a real case study. This will be done through an analysis of the graphic folder of the project and through a non-directive interview collected from Abdelhalim Faïdi [6] who co-designed the project, managed all the studies and then followed the construction works until 2009. This interview is complemented by another given to a national magazine of architecture and urbanism [7].

It should be noted that although we were able to visit the common areas of the MAE<sup>2</sup>, we were unable to take photographs, despite a lengthy administrative procedure. However, after studying the documents we had collected, particularly those of the architect Abdelhalim Faïdi, we concluded that we had enough material to begin our research.

### 2.1. Definition of concepts

#### 2.1.1. Authenticity / Heritage values

Authenticity is a judgement based on a critical evaluation of the heritage object. This assessment is based on criteria that reflect the values of the heritage [2], which are of great importance. As a result, our historical sites acquire the status of "authentic heritage" following a selection process based on the assessment of values [8]. These latter are the characteristics perceived as positive by an individual or a group of individuals [9]. This work aims to understand how they are reinterpreted and integrated into the contemporary MAE project.

#### 2.1.2. Identity and contemporaneity in architecture

According to Benjemia, cities acquire their particular identity through architectural projects [1] which present themselves in two ways.

- 1- Firstly, as part of a global logic linked to globalisation, which obscures cultural and individual singularities.

- 2- Secondly, opting for a reinterpretation-integration of the local heritage as a witness of the past which is capable of founding and enriching new projects.

This research focuses on the second approach. The interest in heritage values lies in the fact that they are positive characteristics that determine the authenticity of a heritage asset and justify its conservation. They are important cultural elements in the eyes of those for whom they are preserved, because they reflect their own identity in a context of globalisation and normalisation. The challenge would be to find a means of recognising these values and then formally reinterpreting them in the design to give an architectural project a local identity.

**2.2. Genesis of the analysis grid**

*2.2.1. Randall Mason approach*

This approach is one of the most elaborate on the values of historic architectural heritage [3]. We will retain two points.

- 1- The typology of socio-cultural values which first allows them to be identified and then to understand them, as according to Mason they contribute to the process of cultural affiliation (Table 1).

*Table 1. Typology of social cultural values of R. Mason [3]*

SOCIO-CULTURAL VALUES    INTERPRETATION	
<b>HISTORICAL VALUE</b>	
ARTISTIC VALUE	Based on the uniqueness of the object, its quality or its exemplarity or finally because it is the work of a particular personality.
EDUCATIONAL/ACADEMIC VALUE	The capacity of the heritage to teach about the past for the future.
<b>CULTURAL / SYMBOLIC VALUE</b>	
POLITICAL VALUE	This value comes from the relationship that links the civic/social value and the physical environment, which are the heritage sites. Endowed with this value, they contribute to stimulating positive thinking toward building a civil society, acquiring government legitimacy, or being a means of protest.
VALUE LINKED TO CRAFTS / WORK	Practices linked to the introduction of local craftsmanship and the methods used to design or build heritage assets.
<b>SOCIAL VALUE</b>	
SOCIAL VALUE	This value refers to the attachment of a community for a particular place.
<b>SPIRITUAL/RELIGIOUS VALUE</b>	
SPIRITUAL/RELIGIOUS VALUE	A value associated with the "official" practices and places of worship of great religions, but also with feelings of wonder, of stupor or even respect imposed by the great works of man or nature.

### AESTHETIC VALUE

AESTHETIC VALUE	A value that refers more generally to the feeling of well-being or fullness through contact with the "beautiful". It may be considered as the most personal value, and therefore the most subjective of the socio-cultural values.
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- 2- The notion of linking these values to the physical characteristics of the heritage. For this research, it represents the interface between the socio-cultural values of the heritage and their reinterpretation-integration into the contemporary project. Therefore, a classification was deduced from the work of Philippe Genestier and Leila Ammar.

#### 2.2.2. Philippe Genestier approach

This approach is extremely relevant to our research because it deals with public buildings built in Paris during the presidency of François Mitterrand (1981-1995) as part of an architectural policy aimed at the prestige of the country and desire to be recognised by its citizens [4]. This was the political environment in which the MAE project was born. Following the installation of a new government in 1999, it launched major projects throughout the country: the east-west motorway, the construction of one million housing units and large buildings, mainly in the capital, such as the headquarters of many ministries, including the MAE. The aim was to regain legitimacy after a decade marked by a wave of terrorism and political turbulence caused by the interruption of the electoral process in the early 1990s. The main elements which characterize this policy are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Elements of analysis from Genestier's work [4]

ANALYSIS ELEMENTS	INTERPRETATION
FORMS	Volumetry and external aspect of the project
STYLE	Characteristics and architectonic details
FUNCTIONAL AMBITIONS	Quality and contemporaneity of spaces
MEANING	Message conveyed by major contemporary projects, aspirations, political instrumentalization

#### 2.2.3. Leila Ammar work

Ammar's work is essentially based on the question of contemporary architectural practice inspired by the built heritage of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Tunisia. Ammar deals with this subject in three stages

- 1- First, the way in which architects refer to and reinterpret the architectural heritage of this period in their contemporary project.
- 2- Second, to see how these cultural models, adopted by the architects and demanded by the clients, come together to achieve a standard of "good taste" for the public.
- 3- Finally, to identify the elements of this heritage of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that are effectively perceived as representative of national identity [5].

These elements are reported in Table 3. The choice of this approach is therefore obvious, especially given the similarities with the objectives of this research and the MAE case study, which is a contemporary building whose architecture is inspired by the local built heritage.

Table 3. Elements of analysis from Ammar’s work [5]

ANALYSIS ELEMENTS	INTERPRETATION
PRACTICES	Conceptual approach
DISCOURSE	Protagonists: architects, sponsors, public
FORMS	Volumetry and layout of spaces
REFERENCES TO BUILD HERITAGE	Reinterpretation of the architectural heritage in contemporary projects

Combining the two approaches allows the following synthesis to be made reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Synthesis of Genestier and Ammar’s approaches

SYNTHESIS OF TWO APPROACHES	INTERPRETATION
FORMS	Volumetry, layout of spaces and external aspect of the project
AMBITIONS AND DISCOURSE	Heritage in contemporary architectural production: between aspiration and political instrumentalization
REFERENCE TO THE HERITAGE	Heritage architect’s reference
PRACTICE	Design process
SIGNIFICANCE	Message conveyed by the big contemporary projects
STYLE	Reinterpretation of the architectural details of our built heritage in contemporary architectural language

Combining the typology values of Randall Mason with the synthesis of classifications by Genestier and Ammar, helped in developing a grid to analyse the reinterpretation of values (abstract concept) and their formal integration (concrete concept) in the studied project. Table 5 shows the proposed analytical grid.

Table 5. Proposal for an analysis grid

VALUES (ABSTRACT CHARACTERISTICS)	INTERPRETATION IN THE ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT (CONCRETE CHARACTERISTICS)
<b>HISTORICAL VALUE</b>	
ARTISTIC VALUE	Forms
EDUCATIONAL / ACADEMIC VALUE	Reference to the built heritage
<b>CULTURAL / SYMBOLIC VALUE</b>	
POLITICAL VALUE	Ambitions and discourse

VALUE LINKED TO CRAFTS / WORK	Practices linked to the introduction of local crafts in the contemporary project
<b>SOCIAL / SPIRITUAL VALUE</b>	
SOCIAL / SPIRITUAL VALUE	Significance
<b>AESTHETIC VALUE</b>	
AESTHETIC VALUE	Style

### 3. Discussion

The grid consists of a series of two columns: The first contains the heritage values and the second their concrete reinterpretation based on their respective definitions.

Historical value will be identified by reinterpreting artistic and educational/academic values. The artistic value of the project is highlighted beyond its formal aspect, through the understanding of the developed reflection in the project's volumetry and functioning. The references to the historical architectural heritage incorporated into the project will undoubtedly give it an educational and academic value. The cultural/symbolic value of the architectural project of the MAE will be deduced from the interpretation of political value and value linked to crafts/work.

As a project of sovereignty, the MAE headquarters has a political value and was analysed through the study of the project sponsor's speeches and the architects. This made it possible to deduce the intentions of the former regarding the instrumentalization of a specific historical architectural heritage and the attitude of the latter towards it. The use of local crafts in the interior design, such as tapestry, pottery, mosaics, etc. will give the project the value associated with crafts or traditional construction skills. "Social and spiritual values" correspond to society's recognition of a local heritage in all its diversity. We will see how the MAE architects have chosen to convey this idea. Their approach reflects the point of view of the Algerian elite, a reflection of this society on the question of identity, which is closely linked to heritage in general. It should be noted that this question has evolved over the years in our country and has now led to the recognition of several facets of our long-hidden heritage.

An examination of the style adopted by the architects allowed the aesthetic value to be assessed. According to Owen Hopkins, "(...) each individual 'style' is conceived according to shared formal characteristics, geography, broad cultural trends, movements or ideologies - or any combination thereof" [10]. Thus, interest focuses on the external formal characteristics. Inspired by the works of S. Bousmaha and M. Cheikh Zouaoui [11], an analysis is also made of the secondary elements that influence the overall composition, where a contemporary reinterpretation of the historical heritage was noted. Finally, in the "aesthetic value" there is the same desire to "contemporise" the heritage.

The grid will thus provide a link between the heritage values and their reinterpretation and integration into the contemporary project and create complementarity between the authenticity of the heritage and the identity of the project.

#### 3.1. Application of the analysis grid to the MAE project

The MAE Headquarters project is the example used to test the relevance of the analysis grid. The Algerian state launched this project at the beginning of this

millennium (2001) and its design entrusted to a group of architects, Abdelhalim Faïdi & Elias Bouchama. The MAE was inaugurated in 2011.

### 3.2. Historical value

#### 3.2.1. From artistic value to shape

The aim was to examine the reinterpretation of the artistic value of the project by studying its volume and functional layout. The location of the building recalls the positioning model of ancient citadels such as the citadel of Algiers. Built on the heights at the top of the Casbah (old city) for security and defensive reasons, in the case of the MAE it obeys more urban and architectural imperatives.

According to A. Faïdi: "A building of this status must see and be seen; it is a controlled benchmark in the urban fabric" [7]. The location chosen for the MAE project is on a ridge in order to stand out and benefit from greater visibility. Its position, combined with its orientation, enables it to take advantage of framing views of the Bay of Algiers, its Casbah, as well as of the valleys of the Kouba and El Mouradia districts (Figure 1).

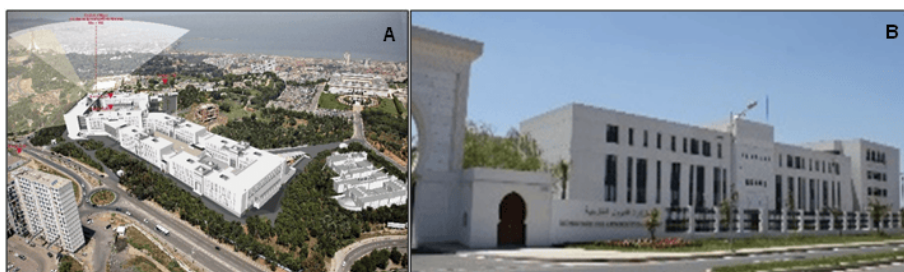


Figure 1. (A) Visual perception from the MAE photomontage; and (B) external view (source: A. Faïdi, architect).

The building is structured to resemble a fortress, a medina: a linear and thick, relatively closed external enclosure pierced by several doors. Apart from these doors, with their traditional decorations surmounted by domes that give them a cultural connotation, the external aspect of the building uses a contemporary, even universal architecture.

The choice of granite and the white coating of the exterior helps to produce a special lighting effect that highlights the silhouette of the building.

The ground plan has an old key shape as is visible in Figure 2. It is made up of two parts: the representative part, which houses the offices of the Ministry, in a square shape, and the working part, which houses the various departments.

The articulation of the two parts gives the whole a very contemporary character. As the client's recommendation was to draw inspiration from Arab-Muslim architecture, the various buildings are linear and structured around two courtyards, patios, underlined by arcaded galleries leading to the offices. The first courtyard, called "Sahat El Wazir", meaning the Minister's courtyard, is a 50 m square of monumental proportions (Figure 3A). The organisation, choice of materials, decorative elements and landscaping are all designed to represent the state with dignity.



Figure 2. MAE ground plan (source: A. Faïdi, architect).

The second courtyard, called "Es Saha El Âadia", the service courtyard, is 30 metres long, and divided into two areas, according to the topography of the land, on which there are nine directions (Figure 3B). Like the local traditional houses, the layout is rich: the presence of water brings freshness, there is local vegetation, and the use of noble materials aims to ensure both durability and prestige. The architects have also included a composition of canals and landscaping in a contemporary language.



Figure 3. (A) Sahat El Wazir (Minister's courtyard); and (B) Es Saha El Âadia (service courtyard) (source: A. Faïdi, architect).

The monumental volumetric composition is reminiscent of medieval palaces, with a contemporary emphasis on respecting human scale through an adapted grid. The architects have organised their project around a 5.40 m module that can be multiplied or divided, allowing them to arrange the spaces and harmonise the facades. Combined with constructive systems of removable internal partitions, the project will benefit from a high degree of flexibility, allowing it to be extended or retracted in different directions over time and according to the country's foreign policy. The MAE floor plan is reported in Figure 4.



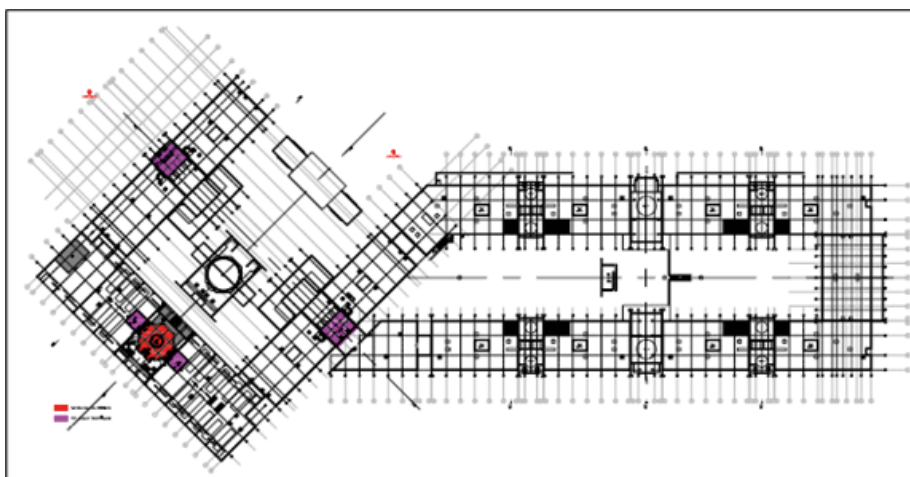


Figure 4. MAE Floor plan (source: A. Faïdi, architect).

In the exterior facades (Figure 5) there is an evident desire to establish two distinct readings: one that draws upon a historical loophole and arcade-like opening system, and another that adopts a contemporary approach, incorporating the "barcode" concept. This juxtaposition of elements imbues the facades with a sense of lightness. Additionally, the dimensions of the windows, their cut-outs, and their arrangement allude to a pursuit of the human scale.



Figure 5. MAE external facade (CSCEC Algérie, s.d.).

It is evident that the project of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, in its capacity as the representation of the Algerian State, possesses an inherent uniqueness and exemplary character that is intrinsic to its artistic value. The architects seek to reinforce this uniqueness through their conceptual choices, namely: the strategic building siting of the project within the urban environment, thereby ensuring its optimal visibility and facilitating exceptional visual breakthroughs; and the aspiration to harmoniously integrate ancient and contemporary architectural elements through the composition of the ground plan, the volume, the functionality and articulation of the facades.

### 3.2.2. From educational/academic value to built heritage references

It should be noted that this value is predicated on the capacity to acquire knowledge of one's heritage in order to build one's future. When applied to the context of architectural projects, this principle is particularly salient, as it underscores the significance of the built heritage in serving as a point of reference for the project in question. Since the project's inception, the client's intention has been to express the cultural and architectural identity of Algeria in its Arab-Muslim dimension [7]. The client's vision was to create a pictorial representation of archetypes, including domes, arcades, and ornamental decorations, drawing upon a range of eras and regions, particularly in the context of the Muslim world, with a focus on the eastern regions. The architects will attempt to reframe this discourse. It is imperative to acknowledge that the cultural heritage of a region is characterised by the converging influences of multiple civilisations, which have interwoven with local traditions, giving rise to regional peculiarities and cultural diversities [6]. The following principles will guide their conceptual approach:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should reveal the cultural mosaic.
- Its architecture should reflect what we are today: modern but linked to our heritage.

Based on these principles, they use many references to our heritage.

### 3.2.3. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The Casbah of Algiers, the urban historical core of the city; its straight rectilinear white walls outside contrast with the curved lines of the arcades and the richly decorated interior (Figure 6).



Figure 6. The Casbah of Algiers. (A) External view; and (B) internal view of a house patio (source: Author 2024)

The Dome of the Rock (691-692) is of particular interest due to its spiritual value, as well as the relief treatment of its façade and dome (Figure 7). Observation of the MAE reveals the presence of these features on various facades.



Figure 7. (A) The dome of the Rock in El Quds (Palestine) (Ludvig14, 2015); and (B) external elevation of the MAE (source: A. Faïdi architect).

The Shah's Mosque in Ispahan (1612-1630) for its location and its relationship with the urban fabric of the city (Figure 8). In this regard, the architect, A. Faïdi says: « (...) this mosque is located within an urban fabric that is not oriented towards Mecca. In the Anassers neighborhood and on the MAE project site, the urban layout does not face the Casbah. (...) » [6]. The architects modified the orientation of the section accommodating the minister's offices with the objective of capitalising on the diverse vistas offered by the surrounding area, especially regarding the Casbah of Algiers. This strategic alteration resulted in the establishment of an articulation between the two distinct components of the edifice, thereby enhancing the overall functionality and aesthetic appeal of the complex.



Figure 8. The formal composition of the MAE (A) The Shah's Mosque [12]; (B) aerial view showing how the MAE headquarters fits in with its surrounding area (source: A. Faïdi architect).

The architecture of Andalusian palaces, particularly the patio of the Generalife palace in the Alhambra complex in Granada (Figure 9), which is characterised by the exuberant decoration of its interior gardens, thanks to the masterly use of light, colour and scents [13]. This can be seen in the courtyards of the MAE (Figure 3).



Figure 9. Generalife palace patio. (A) Arcade decoration view; and (B) garden landscaping (source: Author 2014).

The Bardo Museum in Algiers (Figure 10A), for its vaulted arcades, which were constructed during the Ottoman period. These architectural features can be seen in the courtyards and on select facades of the MAE (Figure 10B).



Figure 10. Treatment of galleries in interior courtyards. (A) Bardo museum courtyard; and (B) galleries in the service courtyard of the MAE (source: (A) Author 2024; (B) A. Faïdi architect).

#### 3.2.4. After the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The built heritage of the French era of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the neo-Moorish style is characterised by a strong Arab Muslim imprint. The Algiers prefecture (presently Algiers Wilaya, Figure 11A) was constructed between 1908 and 1913, and the El Biar town hall (presently the Communal People's Assembly APC Figure 11B) features a front door that draws considerable inspiration from the front doors of the medinas of North Africa. It is important to note that at this time, architects began to reflect on the concept of an 'Algerian style'. Of particular note is the work of Georges Guiauchain, who defined this style as a result of the intersection of local and contemporary architectural forms found elsewhere. Guiauchain's approach to architectural in-



spiration, as outlined in his work, involves the extraction of characteristics from Muslim arts through a thorough exploration of the philosophy underpinning their creation [14].



Figure 11. (A) Algiers Wilaya headquarters (Wilaya d'Alger, s.d.); (B) El-Biar Communal People's Assembly headquarters (Awlad El Biar Fidel Usma, 2013); and (C) one of the MAE access doors; (B) A. Faïdi architect).

This approach, therefore, does not entail a mere imitation of the existing forms, but rather a thoughtful integration of their distinctive features to create something new and original.

Finally, Faïdi and Bouchama explore diverse reflections initiated by certain architects who have left an indelible mark on architecture in Algeria following independence, or elsewhere, by seeking inspiration from the local heritage.

- Abderrahmane Bouchama is a noteworthy figure in the realm of Algerian architecture, distinguished by his unwavering commitment to the preservation and advancement of national architectural heritage. His references were alternately the Hispano-Moorish architecture that is found in Tlemcen, the oriental palaces of the Muslim era, or the vernacular architecture in the Sahara that was less affected by the French colonial influence [15].
- Fernand Pouillon, a renowned French architect, has a significant body of work in Algeria, both before and after the country's independence. The Casbah of Algiers and the traditional city of the Mediterranean basin will serve as his primary references [16]. The architect's approach was characterised by a unique synthesis of Roman, Andalusian, Ottoman and French influences, reflecting a contemporary stance while simultaneously honouring historical heritage.
- Raceem Badrane, a Jordanian architect whose projects are inspired by the local cultural heritage. For Badrane, it is not a matter of copying the forms of the past, but of understanding their values and ultimately translating them into contemporary architecture. Given that Islamic culture has drawn on previous references, R. Badrane advocates continuity [17]. The approach of architects through the adoption of diversity in references to the built heritage provides the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with an educational and academic value.

### 3.3. Cultural / Symbolic value

#### 3.3.1. From political value to ambitions and discourse

Many official building projects are carried out in order to put the symbolic use of the architectural heritage at the service of politics, motivated by the search for

prestige and the recognition of power [18]. It would be interesting to examine the arguments put forward by the state, which sponsored the MAE project, and by the architects and designers. The state wanted the MAE to reflect Algerian identity in its Arab-Muslim dimension. This approach finds its essence in the contemporary history of Algeria. After independence, the ideological programme aimed to restore the values of Arab-Muslim civilisation from which the people had been deprived during colonisation [19]. This is reflected in the first national charters (1964, 1976) and in the country's various constitutions. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, if the State's desire remains the same, these ambitions and its discourse change. This period saw the arrival in 1999 of a new political body at the head of the country. Algerian diplomacy is actively on the international scene. Participation in regional, continental and international summits and meetings, the signing of agreements and official visits abroad [20]. Algeria wants to regain its place as a leader and essential partner after a decade of internal turmoil. It wants to distinguish itself from the dogmatic Islam that has infiltrated its territory by restoring its national religious reference point, which advocates moderation and coexistence. The MAE project will be an opportunity for Algeria to send a strong signal to its foreign partners through its architecture, which must be identified with a glorious and powerful civilisation, the Arab-Muslim civilisation. This vision will also be reflected in the National Prize for Architecture and Urbanism. The State will grant it for four consecutive times to projects in which the reference to the Arab-Muslim identity is present, such as the project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012. For architects, the MAE project is an opportunity to reflect deeply on Algeria's identity. Architects do not hesitate to enrich their work, particularly by building on the reflections of their predecessors, mentioned above, who have addressed this question. With these references, they bring together all the prerequisites they have accumulated during their professional careers and advocate local architecture in a universal logic [7]. They put forward the following principles:

- The building must stand the test of time and make history; therefore, it should avoid clichés and the influences of fashion.
- It should not resemble any style at the first degree [6]. The archetypes and traditional ornamentation will be redesigned and reshaped in a contemporary language that must be suggestive.

The project by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlights the state's desire to exploit Algeria's history in such a way as to assimilate its authenticity into a very specific identity. Faced with this, the architects will show their desire to contribute to the construction of a local plural identity that does not exclude any historical dimension. This will generate confrontations and negotiations throughout the design process, giving the project a political value.

### 3.3.2. *From the value of craftwork to practices*

According to Mason, the value attached to craftsmanship or work shows the methods for designing or constructing heritage; in our grid, it corresponds to the introduction and reinterpretation of local crafts in the project. For this, the architects have called on two Algerians of international renown: Rachid Koraïchi, for the interior design, and Chafik Gasmi, for the design of the prestigious spaces such as the minister's office, the banqueting hall and the theatre [6] (Figure 12). Rachid Koraïchi is an artist whose work draws its richness and originality from Arabic calligraphy, which

he associates with the signs and symbols of many civilisations, particularly Berber [21]. Inspired by Sufism, his works transcend the spiritual dimension by showing the tolerance and openness of Islam. A modernist artist, he seeks to reorganise artistic production through cosmopolitan and contemporary practices that combine tradition and modernity. These creations will be fully integrated into the walls, floors and architecture of the MAE. Chafik Gasmi, an architect and designer, is known for his designs for major brand stores and hotels. His designs aim to renew the identity of these brands [22]. Inspired by tradition but looking to the future, his work does not follow fashion or trends. His creations are often described as timeless, which aligns with the architects' vision of architects. Gasmi offers refined, clean spaces, both in surface treatment and furniture creating a neutral environment that translates the conciliatory diplomacy of Algeria.



Figure 12. Virtual decoration. (A) Entrance hall to a department indicating the special position of the decoration (Elevation & section); (B) Decoration proposal by R. Koraichi (source: A. Faïdi, architect); and (C) Chafik Gasmi's proposal (source: [22]).

As part of its diplomatic mission, the MAE is a place that can demonstrate the value of national craftsmanship, thus highlighting Algeria's mixed identity. The choice to work with Rachid Korichi and Chafik Gasmi is not only aimed at promoting craftsmanship, but also at offering a contemporary reinterpretation through their creations, which are recognised internationally. It should be noted that although these two artists have developed the interior design and the design file, their project was not implemented.

### 3.3.3. From social and spiritual value to significance

The examination of this value will be done through the analysis of the meaning of the concept of identity from the point of view of the Algerian elite, which we will cross-check with that of the architects-designers. The question of identity has always been at the centre of a passionate debate among the Algerian elite. This debate involves

Arabists, Francophiles, Amazigh advocates, Islamists, secularists or a combination of these tendencies. Following the political changes in our country, one of these dimensions of national identity, championed by a segment of our elite, has been put forward, even if the Arab-Muslim character remains a feature of ubiquitous identification [23]. However, it must be recognised that until the end of the 1980s, the elite defending the Amazigh, local identity, as a component of the Algerian nation, was the most marginalised [24]. Described as a degrading folklore, the indigenous culture was excluded by the other segments of the elite [19]. At the beginning of this millennium, we saw major advances: the recognition of the country's mother tongue, Amazigh, in 2002, and the recognition of great French-speaking Algerian writers and thinkers who had long been ignored. Other aspects of Algerian identity have also been rehabilitated, such as the spiritual and cultural work of North African Islam through its 'zaouia' (brotherhoods), or more generally the contribution of Christian and colonial heritage [19]. Today, Algeria is trying to reconnect with its plural identity, made up of endogenous and exogenous influences. In this context, the architects propose a contemporary project based on heritage references that reflect the identity of our society [6]. This has been developed in the presentation of the educational and academic value linked to references to the built heritage and the value linked to craftsmanship. It will also be explored in the following section on aesthetic value. This analysis shows that the architects took into account social and spiritual values.

#### 3.3.4. *From aesthetic value to style*

The aesthetic value will be assessed by examining the reinterpretation of the architectural details of the heritage and their integration into certain secondary elements of the project.

##### 3.3.4.1. Galleries

Galleries are present in the architecture of the Casbah of Algiers; they run along the interior courtyards, as visible in Figure 13A. However, although these elements are present in these houses on both the ground and first floor [25], the architects decided to integrate them only on the ground floor, which overhangs a contemporary volume.

This choice suggests an anchoring in history and tradition, as well as a vision oriented towards the future and modernity.

##### 3.3.4.2. Arcades

The ogee arch used has a horseshoe shape that narrows at the base. Inspired by the arches developed in the Islamic world, particularly in the Maghreb and in Andalusia by the Almoravids, it has a local specificity: it is broken, allowing great flexibility in the dimension of the span while maintaining a constant height [25]. The columns supporting the arches, traditionally made of marble, stone or tuff, are in reinforced concrete with a square protective base topped by elongated shafts without capitals, giving the whole a modern look. A few examples are shown in Figure 14. If in the local architecture arcades are mainly found in courtyards and interiors, in the MAE they decorate some parts of the facades, especially those of the noble rooms generally, such as the terrace of the Minister's Office, the Banquet or Acts Hall or the Conference Room (Figure 15).





Figure 13. The galleries in the Casbah and in the MAE project. (A) Patio of Khdaoudj house at the Casbah; and (B) service yard at the MAE (source:(A) Authors, 2017; (B) A. Faïdi, architect).

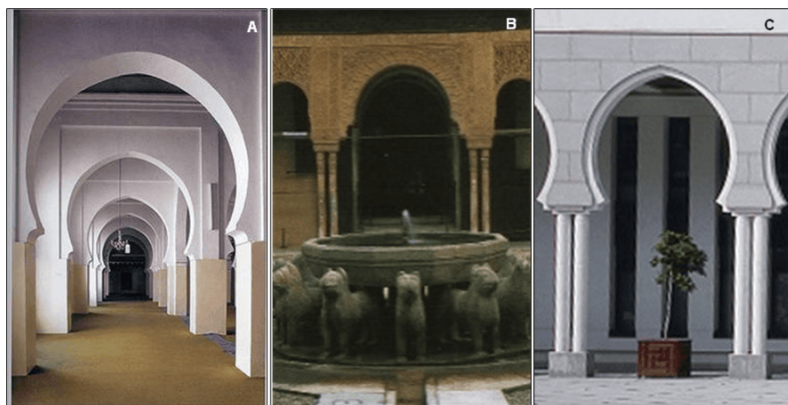


Figure 14. Typology of arcades: traditional and those used in the MAE project. (A) Horseshoe arches narrowed at the base. Tlemcen Mosque (Almoravides 1082); (B) detail of double colonnades in Lions' courtyard, Palace of Alhambra, Granada (Spain), 4<sup>th</sup> century; and (C) MAE service yard, horseshoe arch with double colonnades (source: (A) Author 2024; (B) J. Bermudes Lopez [13]; (C) A. Faïdi, architect).

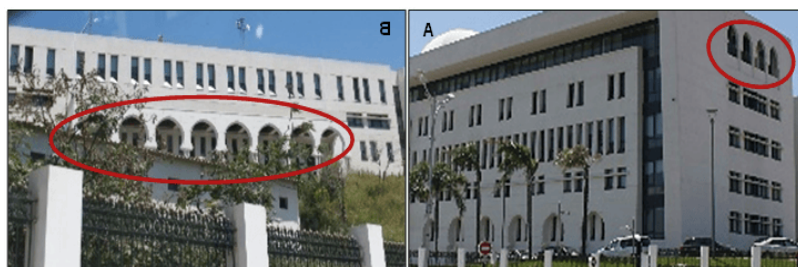


Figure 15. The use of arcades outside in the MAE project. (A) North-West Facades and (B) South-West Façade (source: A. Faïdi, architect).

### 3.3.4.3. Doors

On a formal level, the architects were inspired by traditional doors; on the ornamental level, however, their suggestion remains modern. The decoration is found in the composition of the vertical elements (jambs, openings) and the horizontal elements (beams, cornices...), in the proportions of their surroundings and in the choice of texture used in the coverings. The construction materials and system employed are of a contemporary nature. These elements are visible in the pictures of Figure 16.

### 3.3.4.4. Decorative motif

The ornamentation is formalised, above all, in the paving of the courtyards and galleries of the MAE. Based on the regulatory layout, they come in different compositions thanks to a set of values.

- Full and empty
- Black and white
- Changes in materials and colours [26]

The architects were undoubtedly inspired by the traditional tiles, called *zelliges*, (Figure 17) in their regulatory layout, but not in their dimensions or in the contemporary construction process.

### Typology of doors in traditional Maghreb architecture



*"Boujloud door" in Fes (Morocco). Access door to the old Town (12<sup>th</sup> century) (Michal Osmenda, s.d.).*



*Door of house in the Casbah of Algiers (source: Author, 2017).*



*Room access door. Khdaoudj House in the Casbah of Algiers (source: Authors, 2017).*




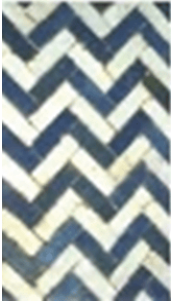
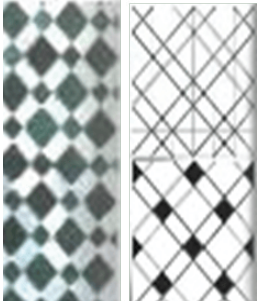

Re-interpretation of traditional typology of doors in the MAE architecture		
		
Access door to «Sahat El Wazir», The minister's courtyard, name given as a reference to the access door to the old medina (source: A. Faïdi, architect).	«Bab El Wazir», The minister's door, name given as a reference to the door access of old house (source: A. Faïdi, architect).	Access door to directions, in reference to the door access of room of old house (source: A. Faïdi, architect).

Figure 16. The reinterpretation and integration of traditional doors in the MAE project.

Some types of regulatory traces that we find in traditional Maghreb architecture [26]		
		
Herringbone pattern, starting from a square cross-linked in 36 equal divisions.	Plotted diagonally, starting from a square cross-linked in 36 equal divisions. We obtain geometric patterns inclined at 45°.	El Menchia (Regulatory layout in the labyrinth of a fountain).




Re-interpretation of tradition in the treatment of courtyards and gallery floors (source: A. Faïdi, architect)		
		
<i>Herringbone pattern, repeated in the flooring of the Ministry's galleries.</i>	<i>Diagonal patterns traced and repeated in the soil of the Ministry's courtyard (Synthesis Image).</i>	<i>Ministry's courtyards with a covering of black granite labyrinth on a white background referring to the « Menchias » as above (Synthesis Image).</i>

Figure 17. The reinterpretation and integration of traditional ornamentations in the MAE project (source: Authors).

#### 3.3.4.5. Domes

In the old city of Algiers (the Casbah) domes had many functions. They were elements of signage, a show of dominance by their verticality, spiritual symbolism, a practical covering of large square spaces without support points, a provision of thermal regulation [27]. The MAE architects only retained the first two. A large dome was placed above the Acts Room [22] and small domes marked the rooms of the various departments. The aesthetic value of the MAE was marked by a style adopted by the architects. They chose to integrate the architectural details with a heritage connotation into certain secondary parts of the project. These details have been reinterpreted in a contemporary language: purity of form, use of contemporary materials and integration into the volumetric composition, giving coherence to the whole, where the new and the old languages complement each other to create a specific and unique project.

## 4. Synthesis

The analysis of the building project for the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided an opportunity to verify the relevance of the analysis grid by examining the reinterpretation-integration of each of its values in the project.

The "historical value" was examined through two sub-categories:

- The "artistic value" was analysed through the architectural aspects themselves: position on a ridge, introverted volume, refined facades referring

- to ancient citadels, functionality, all taken up in a new language that includes principles of visibility, visual perception, articulation and flexibility.
- The "educational and academic value", was explored through research into the built heritage, to which the architects were sensitive, and which gave the contemporary project a heritage base.

The "cultural/symbolic value" was examined through two sub-categories:

- The 'political value', which made it possible to identify the ambitions of the sponsor of the MAE project and the architects who designed it. While the former wanted to reproduce Arab-Muslim architecture in its entirety, the latter were more inclined towards a process of reinterpreting and integrating the local heritage without exclusion.
- The "value related to crafts or work", which has allowed us to explore our country's intangible heritage through the introduction of its crafts into the interior design of the project. The architects took advantage of the contribution of a painter and an internationally renowned interior designer who are sensitive to the updating of heritage.

The "social and spiritual values" were addressed from the point of view of the Algerian elite on the question of identity, which is closely linked to heritage in general. This question has evolved and is now leading to the recognition of several facets of our heritage that have long been ignored. The architects have chosen to take up this idea. Finally, the aesthetic value of the MAE buildings is enhanced by the contemporary reinterpretation of architectural heritage details and their integration into secondary elements.

## 5. Conclusion

The interest of this research is that it proposes a new answer to the question of the authenticity of heritage as a factor in the construction of local identity in contemporary projects. This has been done by introducing the concept of values, which makes it possible to integrate all the dimensions of this heritage: historical, cultural, social and aesthetic.

The development of the analysis grid was challenging because it had to serve as an interface for reinterpreting heritage values - often abstract concepts - and integrating them into contemporary projects that are concrete in nature. The grid revealed the characteristics of the architecture of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs project in Algiers and its relationship with the values of our heritage. This building is a model both in the history of architecture as well as in the political history of Algeria.

The reinterpretation-integration of heritage values in the contemporary project would benefit from being deeply studied, as shown in the work on aesthetic value by C. Bousmaha and Z. Cheikh [11].

Research into the values of the architectural heritage is an essential lever for guaranteeing the authenticity of buildings by highlighting their historical, cultural, social and aesthetic dimensions.

Enriching current architectural practice by reinterpreting and integrating these values into contemporary projects is not simply an act of reproduction or conservation, but an active contribution to the construction of a collective architectural identity, while meeting the challenges of innovation, sustainability and territorial coherence.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Local architectural heritage: We have used this expression to refer to all the buildings and structures that reflect the identity and history of our country, Algeria. It includes both vernacular architecture and the more recent heritage of the French colonial period. The latter was inspired by vernacular architecture, such as neo-Moorish heritage, or by external architectural trends that developed at that time, such as modern architecture. It can therefore be said that local architectural heritage is one of the tangible expressions of our local culture.

<sup>2</sup> MAE: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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## Summary

This article examines the relationship between authenticity and identity in contemporary architectural projects. It shows how the integration of historical architectural heritage values can guarantee this authenticity and enrich this identity, based on their reinterpretation and integration in these projects.

The aim is to show that, in order to give a city an identity that reflects its local culture, we need to find ways of extracting from its heritage the positive characteristics and the values that make it authentic, and translating this culture into a new language so that it can be integrated into contemporary projects.

To this end, this paper proposes an analytical grid. Based on a cross-referencing of a number of research studies, it will help to move heritage values from being an abstract concept to being a concrete reinterpretation, enabling them to be integrated into an architectural project. In a second phase, its relevance will be tested through its application to the building project of the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Algiers.

The conclusion of the study shows the interest of this grid, which integrates the historical, cultural, social and aesthetic dimensions of heritage, allowing a better reinterpretation of heritage in contemporary projects with a local identity.

## Riassunto

Questo articolo esamina il rapporto tra autenticità e identità nei progetti architettonici contemporanei. Viene mostrato come l'integrazione dei valori del patrimonio architettonico storico possano garantire tale autenticità e arricchire l'identità, attraverso la loro reinterpretazione e integrazione in questi progetti.

L'obiettivo è dimostrare che, per conferire a una città un'identità che rifletta la sua cultura locale, è necessario trovare il modo di estrarre dal suo patrimonio le caratteristiche positive, i valori che la rendono autentica, e di tradurre la cultura in un nuovo linguaggio, così da poterla integrare nei progetti contemporanei.

A tal fine, si propone una matrice analitica basata sul confronto di diverse ricerche, in grado di contribuire a trasformare i valori del patrimonio culturale da un concetto astratto a una reinterpretazione concreta, consentendone l'integrazione in un progetto architettonico. In una seconda fase, la matrice viene validata attraverso la sua applicazione al progetto edilizio della sede del Ministero degli Affari Esteri ad Algeri. La conclusione dello studio dimostra le potenzialità dell'approccio, che integra le dimensioni storiche, culturali, sociali ed estetiche del patrimonio culturale, consentendo una migliore reinterpretazione del patrimonio stesso nei progetti contemporanei dotandoli di un'identità culturale locale ben definita.