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The Translation of the Architectural Modernization Discourse in Guadeloupe (1928-81)

One of the fundamental aspects of the colonial conquest is the physical domination of a chosen territory, not only in terms of population but also in terms of the symbolic representation of power and its intentions. Architecture, in that context, carries several meanings. Indeed, more than merely an answer to the basic need of sheltering or to aesthetics, architecture is the expression of those who design it and build it. As an instrument of the conscious transfer of ideas, architecture can also be understood as a cultural discourse from a specific group in a specific society.

Guadeloupe is a French overseas department and European region, located in the West Indies. The legacy of its specific history as a tropical colony with an economy based on slavery and large-scale crops (sugar cane, coffee, etc.) can be seen in the way urban forms have been created and developed. The significant urban growth that took place in the twentieth century under the incentive of central authorities to address modernization considerably modified the 'traditional' landscape and generated new forms and typologies. The end of the colonial system in Guadeloupe during that century can be expected to have influenced the translation of central government directives and guidelines. Yet, a closer scrutiny of the latter and their produced architecture and urban forms show that there is a time lag during the translation process.

This paper analyzes the architectural translation of modernization between central authorities (from colonial to post-colonial) and the operational level in Guadeloupe during the twentieth century. It also addresses the question of how translation can be received in a context of domination.

Theoretical Background

Christian Norberg-Schulz was convinced that the meaning of building was related to the locus of human activity and to the building's sense of place.¹ In this approach, space is seen as an abstract, artificial construct that merely indicates a bounded emptiness, whereas place is the site of “presencing”.² Yet, it is less clear from whose perspective and from what type of activities place is generated. As many scholars have already discussed,³ the symbolic significance of place might arguably vary according to one's position, even more in a colonial system where dominant/ dominated relationships often underpin subtler phenomena such as hybridization or rhizomic identity.⁴ As such, architecture as a cultural discourse is admittedly representative of social interactions and those involved in these interactions. In the case of colonial encounters, Bégot⁵ underlines how a major issue concerns the relationship between the source of inspiration and the local creation, which tries to find its way between imitation, interpretation and pure invention. There is a great temptation to reduce it to the classical opposition between the colonizer's architecture and the architecture of the colonized, to refer to Memmi's classification.⁶ Yet, as a cultural language, architectural discourse has rules of grammar and semantics, which form the ways of thinking and talking about the social realm and shape their meanings both to objects and actions. Thus, rather than focusing on the effects of the processes, the research interest focuses on the significance and the role of the architectural translation process rather than its forms. More specifically, the translation of modernization in the architectural discourse between central authorities and the local operational level is the main interest.

The concept of modernization is not straightforward and a number of definitions reflect different perspectives, resulting in the difficulty in grasping the full concept. Whatever meaning is assigned to modernization, what remains constant is the continuum of modernizations displayed throughout human history as well as in material culture. Closer to the time span of this study, the most significant changes occurring during the first decades of the 20th century radically transformed the interpretation of the word: the scale factor, attributed to the purpose of modernization, was increased remarkably. Due to the convergence and complexity of economic, technical and social change during the modern period, restricting the understanding of modernization transformations to the influence of the modern movement in Architecture would undoubtedly greatly narrow the comprehension of the phenomenon. The emergence of a movement is indeed rarely an abrupt

1 This concept was firstly developed in his 1969 essay “The Concept of Place” and then reaffirmed in Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci. Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988).

2 Linda Krause, “Book Reviews”, Review of the *Architecture: Meaning and Place*, by Norberg-Schulz, Christian, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 50 (1991): 197.

3 See for example Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books) and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin. White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

4 As developed by the French Creole Glissant Edouard in his book *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981).

5 Danielle Bégot, ed. “Architecture”, in *La Grande Encyclopédie de la Caraïbe*, Ed. Sanoli, tome VIII, 1990: 269.

6 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer And The Colonized* (New York: Orion Press, 1965).

event but rather the meeting of many elements, directly or indirectly. Furthermore, although in the pre-war period there was an evident interest in seeking the best combinations of technical modernity for buildings (or public works) and new forms and ways to understand space,⁷ not everyone was convinced of its value.⁸ It took time and many different actors before modernization bore the results that are apparent today. This is the reason why, in this research, a broad definition has been used: that is, modernization as “a concept describing a process through which societies are believed to change from less to more developed forms through the introduction of new technology and other social change”, used in this study in order to preserve the weight of diverse contributions to the phenomenon.⁹

The study examines the translation of the architectural modernization discourse at two distinct and critical periods - colonisation and post-colonisation - in Guadeloupe, a former French plantation colony and today a French overseas department and European ultra-peripheral region, located in the West Indies. Guadeloupe offers a history and a contemporary urban development that are strongly influenced by its colonial past and the structures inherent to that type of society, like many of the other Caribbean islands.¹⁰ Based on the author's doctoral dissertation,¹¹ which used historical methodology (source-based research in archives, libraries, etc.) combined with typo-morphological methodology (site survey and measurement, interpretation of town plans and of the building type evolution), the following discussion refers to the same methodological tools. This allows a chronological general narrative supplemented with precise analysis of case studies. More precisely, among the great variety of the collected documents that could provide insight into the architectural discourse employed by France, two types of documents were favoured for this article. The first type concerns reports, articles and pictures from national and international congresses and exhibitions which were considered relevant, for they aimed at presenting a synthetic view on different aspects concerning the colonies, as well as alternatives to be considered for the colonies' development. The second type relates to the correspondence between France and local authorities in Guadeloupe regarding buildings, architecture and urban planning, for it speaks about actions and potential gaps between ideologies and practices. The choice of the study periods was made in regards to relevant key-dates that bore meaning not only in the societal context but also for the built context. As such the first period 1848-1946, with 1848 being the date of the end of the slavery system in France and 1946 the date of the departmentalization, includes the tercentenary anniversary of the annexation of French Antilles - including Guadeloupe - to France in 1935; it also includes the catastrophe of

7 Jean-Louis Cohen, “La marche de l'architecture moderne”, in *Histoire de l'Art*, ed. Albert Chatelet and Bernard Philippe Groslier (Paris: Larousse, 1988), 212.

8 For example, the dominant attitude towards Loos' *Raumplan* (“spatial plan”), a proposal to renew the rules of the internal distribution in a building, reflects the fixedness of the intellectual establishment in the early 20th century quite well.

9 *Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (Chicago: MICRA Inc., 1998).

10 For more information about French West Indies political and economical context within the Caribbean see Aaron G. Ramos and I. Angel Rivera, *Islands at the Crossroads. Politics in the Non-Independent Caribbean* (Boulder, Col.: Rienner, 2001).

11 Karine Dupré, “Caribbean Urban Modernization: A Typomorphological Study of Two Towns in Guadeloupe (1928-2003)” (PhD diss., Universities Antilles-Guyane/Tampère, 2004).

1928, when a cyclone devastated the island. The second period - 1946-81 - reflects the immediate decolonization period and its aftermath just before the establishment of decentralization by French president Francois Mitterrand.

The End of the Colonial Period (1848-1946)

Guadeloupe, “this Old Colony”¹²

“The landscapes have not changed: they are splendid, Guadeloupe ‘The Emerald Island’ and its dependencies [...] provide unforgettable memories of beauty. But the scenery of daily life [...] does not match: outside of some administrative modern buildings, a comfortable hotel (in Basse-Terre), there are still too many wooden constructions, tokens of the devastating hurricane of 1928, small, grey, lacking aesthetics and without much comfort.”¹³

At the beginning of the 20th century, the French colonial empire was on the brink of a clear revival. The recent conquests mainly realized under the Third Republic¹⁴ came to revitalize an empire, which had been largely dismantled after 1763,¹⁵ with the Antilles, French Guyana, Sainte-Lucie, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Louisiana (sold in 1803 by Napoleon), La Réunion, and trading posts in India and Senegal, remaining the only traces of former glory. It also created a difference of interest, if not of treatment, between the newer and older colonies, the latter often geographically very far away from mainland France and somehow not as attractive anymore. In parallel, colonial expansion favoured the emergence of a colonial viewpoint, symbolized by the successive creation of political groups or consortiums devoted to the colonial cause. In 1893, for instance, the Colonial Party and the Minister of Colonies were founded in France.¹⁶ It is within this context that the first French colonial congresses were held,¹⁷ benefiting from a colonial imagery (and a colonial imagination) already previously initiated with the Universal Exhibitions of 1889 and 1900, among other events.¹⁸ Despite some protests against the principle of colonization,¹⁹ colonial ideology gradually peaked, reaching its apotheosis in the 1930s, spreading a type of colonial discourse based on “the right of superior

12 This is an affectionate nickname commonly given to Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guyana and La Réunion by the French parliament.

13 CAOM, fm, agefom 100/1,8.

14 These are Tunisia in 1881, Indochina between 1883 and 1886, Madagascar in 1885, Morocco in 1911 and those of Africa between 1881 and 1900, without forgetting the earlier conquest of Algeria in 1830. See Jean Carpentier and François Lebrun (*Histoire de France*, Paris: Ed. Seuil, 1987), 269, 314-17.

15 1763: year of the French defeat against the English, the direct consequence of which was the loss of most American colonies (Treaty of Paris). Cf. Carpentier and Lebrun, *Histoire de France*.

16 During the same year, the French Colonial Union (UCF) was created as an interest group, which joined economic and financial forces. Catherine Bruant, *Le logement et la ville dans les premiers congrès coloniaux français* (Paris: LADRHAUS, 1997), 2.

17 The first French Colonial Congress took place in Paris, between 29 March and 4 April 1903. Bruant, *Le logement et la ville*, 3.

18 For more details see Charles-Robert Ageron, “L’Exposition coloniale de 1931. Mythe républicain ou mythe imperial?”, in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), vol. 1, 493-95.

19 Carpentier and Lebrun, *Histoire de France*, 316.

racés over inferior ones”,²⁰ and on the “civilizing mission” to be undertaken by France. In light of this colonial ideology (to implement “progress” in the colonies²¹), it was thus logical that colonial congresses and exhibitions would mainly focus on assessing how modernization was or should be quickly implemented in the colonies. This was especially evident in the architectural and urban fields, as evidenced in their discussed topics (e.g. “Housing” in 1903, “Regulations concerning the housing construction in the colonies of the tropical zone” in 1906, “The colonial modern house and the bases of its rational organization” in 1909, “Urban Works” in 1922, “The colonial metallic house” in 1931, etc.),²² as well as the regular mention of the introduction of innovations.

Opportunistic Modernization

It is exactly during that period that the tercentenary anniversary of the annexation of the French Antilles to France was celebrated. The event, in 1935, was symbolically quite significant and generated some developments, yet it did not seem to attract the metropolitan public or the Guadeloupians.²³ Indeed, in the aftermath of the Colonial International Exhibition of 1931 in Paris,²⁴ Guadeloupe, “this Old Colony”, surely did not seem to offer the perspectives of new great projects, like those developed in African colonies.²⁵ In a way, this phenomenon reveals how Guadeloupe felt the effects of its age as a colony. Even though promises were made to introduce the latest developments in the field of architecture and urban planning to every French colony,²⁶ in reality the architectural discourse of the 1930s in Guadeloupe was singularly atrophied, reflecting territorial realities very well. Truly, the clear lines of the Guadeloupe pavilion at the Colonial Exhibition of 1931 in Paris, its terrace-roofs, volumes and building materials remind us, without doubt, of the architectural Modern Movement (Fig. 1). However, four years after this exhibition, the 1935 evaluation²⁷ of the colony made on the occasion of the tercentenary exposed a context much more ambivalent than the image displayed by the Pavilion of 1931 could lead us to believe. Furthermore,

20 Excerpt from the speech of Jules Ferry (politician) on 28 July 1885. Carpentier and Lebrun, *Histoire de France*, 320.

21 For more on this colonial ideological trait, see Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, “La colonisation française”, in *Histoire de la France coloniale*, ed. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Charles-Robert Ageron (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991), vol. 3, 13-14.

22 Titles respectively found in the congresses of Paris (first French Colonial Congress, 1903); Marseille (Colonial National Exhibition and Congress, 1906); Paris (the Congress of the Old Colonies, 1909); Marseille (Colonial National Exhibition and Congress, 1922); and Paris (the Great Colonial International Exhibition of 1931). Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

23 It was in the new Museum of Colonies, which was built at the occasion of the International Colonial Exhibition of 1931 in Paris, that the main exhibition concerning the tercentenary was held. The examination of newspapers from that period did not reveal other exhibitions and was besides very laconic on the on-going exhibition. Research conducted at the Centre des Archives de l’Outre-Mer (CAOM), series bib/aom, som and at the Archives Départementales de la Guadeloupe (ADG).

24 For a detailed account of this event, see Catherine Hodeir and Michel Pierre, *L’Exposition coloniale* (Paris-Bruxelles: Complexe, 1991).

25 E.g. the construction of the Congo-Océan railways between 1921 and 1934 in the French Equatorial Africa (or French Congo). To know more about this project, see account by Albert Londres, *Terre d’ébène. Récit d’un voyage en Afrique de l’Ouest* (Albin Michel, 1929).

26 Like the improvements in hygienic conditions, housing (specifically for the colonists), town development, etc. CAOM, bib/aom-12091.

27 Compiled in Gerard Robert, *Les travaux publics de la Guadeloupe* (Paris: Librairie militaire Fournier, 1935).

by precisely assessing the existing built and urban spaces in Guadeloupe in 1935, this evaluation not only reveals the gap between the impression given during the Colonial Exhibition and the distance from a society that would have chosen urban development to mark a strong colonial presence, but also the eventual translation processes. Furthermore, it assessed the processes and forms of the reconstruction that took place after 1928, seen by many as the opportunity to profoundly modernize the island.



Fig. 1. The Pavilion of Guadeloupe by architect Ali Tur, at the International Colonial Exhibition of Paris, 1931. © Musée Saint-John-Perse, Guadeloupe.

Indeed, the hurricane of 1928 was in every way catastrophic: material damage, loss of human life, psychological trauma. But if the ravages were many, seeking the best and fastest reconstruction was in many ways proportional. Although the imminent anniversary of the attachment of Guadeloupe to France might have been one reason for a quick reconstruction, archives seldom refer to it. However, no one can deny the rapidity with which the French government sent help to its “Old Colony”. In addition to the official visits and the various missions commissioned immediately after the disaster,²⁸ the government’s contribution can be explicitly seen not only in its involvement in the reconstruction, mainly in terms of financial support (the sending of building materials and of specialists), but also implicitly in finding new ideas and solutions to building methods. Instead of providing assistance that was limited to logistical means, the government, as well as other agents such as local officials and architects, took the chance to question and revive the concept of building and planning in the colony. Yet the results of this research uncover a discrepancy between the expressed ideology, its words and its actions. Several examples may be cited here.

From Adaptation to Independency

The first example reveals a rupture in the process of the architectural translation of modernization between central authorities and the operational level in Guadeloupe due to a lack of comprehensive overview of the situation on the island. Indeed, the allocated money devoted to the reconstruction

²⁸ For example, the French ambassador to the USA, Paul Claudel, signed his report on his visit to Guadeloupe on October 18th, 1928 (one month after the hurricane), CAOM, fm, sg, qua240/1464; while the earliest reports found from M. Muller, sent as the General Supervisor of the Colonies, Head of the Supervision Mission in Guadeloupe (1928-33), date from 15 December 1928. CAOM, fm, sg, qua252/1518.

by the government as an exceptional subsidy served a precise program set up for the occasion.²⁹ The program was not only a matter of rebuilding houses, but covered a larger field, from providing infrastructure to the colony to aesthetic considerations. Nevertheless, very quickly it appears that for many communes 'reconstruction' actually meant 'new construction', revealing how underdeveloped urban Guadeloupe was. Besides, the 1940 assessment of the reconstruction was far from positive. The reconstruction effort barely reached half of the goals (45.9%) of all the programs: only 4 programs exceeded 50 % and three developed less than 20% of their aims (Fig. 2).³⁰ Obviously, the program failed to fulfil its aims, although the failure of the reconstruction cannot be associated with a shortage of funds, for there was continuous financial support coming from France. It rather demonstrates how the form of the system - too central and too distant - made accurate assessments and continuous dialogue impossible, while its dependency to the motherland was a fragile bond. Events that shook up the motherland had direct repercussions on Guadeloupe: in this case, the profound crisis that hit France in 1931-37 led to a loss of communication.

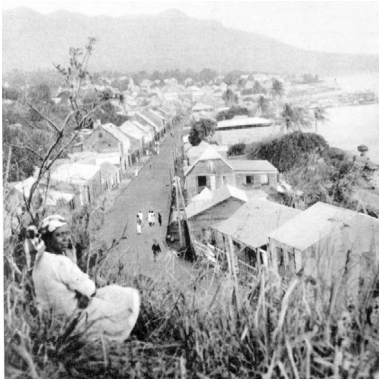


Fig. 2. Basse-Terre (capital city) c. 1935.
© Collection Karine Dupré

The second example shows the impossibility of translation and the adaptation it generated. Indeed, the building material sent to the colony constituted another aspect of governmental support. As a direct consequence of losing the First World War, Germany had to furnish manufactured products as war reparations to the Allies. As such, Guadeloupe received mostly basic building materials (e.g. bags of cement, steel framework) and fixtures and fittings (e.g. doors, windows, toilet bowls, and taps) but with very little knowledge, if any, about their implementation and, most important, their suitability to the island. Thus, through their imposition, a new language had to be learnt, and quickly. It marked Guadeloupe's entrance into a new building period, for the abundance of this type of building material increased the pace of development of the associated methods of building and designing, which would not have fully succeeded without specialists. The provision for extra officers and money for the departments directly concerned with the reconstruction (mainly the

²⁹ And rendered official in law in 1931, Legifrance.

³⁰ CAOM, fm, 1tp/623

Civil Engineering Department) and the commission by the state of an Architect of the Ministry of the Colonies in Guadeloupe to design and supervise the construction of the institutional buildings,³¹ had impressive outcomes: over a four-year period (1929–33) more than 50 buildings were erected, including town halls, churches, presbyteries, schools, post offices, health centres; this includes various urban development plans. These buildings strongly impacted on the island's landscape, not only physically, but also intellectually for they brought corresponding up-skilling to the local workers, which, in turn, developed a singular built language, albeit at a slow pace.³² Indeed, after several years, the use of concrete was no longer restricted to public buildings, but had spread to the houses of wealthy families. This was because concrete embodied a certain image of modernity and represented a certain social ascension, on top of its comforting features. This way of thinking continued for the next sixty years and was eventually extended to the entire population, supported by the ease of finding and using concrete in comparison to the rare, and therefore expensive, local building material (wood), which requires carpentry skills.

Questioning the Relationships Between Central and Local Authorities

Finally, the assessment of a still very dominant rural Guadeloupe, where urban form is rare, also unveils two major elements that characterized French colonization in the Caribbean. The first is the underlying concept of economic interest (not to say greed), and the second is the local historical process, 'creolization', that little by little took place in the island and changed the power relationships between the inhabitants of the island and metropolitan France. Indeed, if the 1935 report clearly revealed the lack of colonial discourse concerning architecture, this does not really come unexpected when we bear in mind what Rondet-Saint, Head of the French Maritime and Colonial League said in 1929: "One must not cease repeating this: colonization is neither a philosophical intervention, nor a sentimental action. For us or for any country, it is a business."³³

Contrary to other colonizers, France in the Caribbean had been from the start more interested in profit than in developing new human settlements.³⁴ As a direct consequence, spatiality in Guadeloupian towns or urban centres, had very little if any direct colonial and governmental influence, since it was in plantations that colonial power was concentrated and expressed, and directed much more by an individual than a by the state. Whether this individual would develop interest or not in urban developments can easily be traced back in each town's history. On the other hand, the fact that there were no 'true' original inhabitants remaining in the island, for

31 CAOM, fm, ltp/440.

32 Until 1940 more than 85% of the Guadeloupean population lived in wooden houses without running water or electricity, with only a mere 3% residing in concrete houses. *Annuaire Statistique de la Guadeloupe*, INSEE, 1981.

33 CAOM, *La Dépêche coloniale*, 29 November 1929.

34 For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Karine Dupré, "Urban Planning and Globalization in Guadeloupe", in *The European City in Transition. Urbanism and Globalization*, ed. Eckardt Frank and Dieter Hassenpflug (Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 2004), vol. 2, 341–54.

they had been wiped out in the early days of colonization, had a certain influence. With 7,200 km between France and Guadeloupe, it was difficult for central government to control Creoles³⁵ who developed a feeling of legitimate ownership. Even with the central government's desire to develop particular towns, only the richest planters or traders were in a position to make, (or not make) such development happen.³⁶ Furthermore, the colonial imperatives enunciated in many reports and at congresses were not necessarily implemented in Guadeloupe. One explanation for this phenomenon is semantic: how can one speak of urban segregation in a Creole society? Who are the original inhabitants in an island populated by imported people, be their arrival voluntary or not? Thus creolization is not only at the foundation of the particular way of colonization and society's genesis but also, in this case, the origin of the urban and architectural forms met in the island. Because colonial power in Guadeloupe was distorted less by a strong physical territorial domination or coherent (or even existing) colonial architectural discourse but mostly by the relationships from one to another (not really colonizer to colonized as described by Memmi, but rather master to slave, or metropolitan to Creole as analyzed by Begot), it simply resulted in a lack of real governmental influence, be the town rich or poor. Thus, the process of translation was at most developed haphazardly and more often under the initiative of an individual process.

One decade later, departmentalization in 1946 signalled the end of the colonial system but also the beginnings of a period of changes.³⁷ Simultaneously, the post-colonial period became significant from the architectural viewpoint because the role of discourse was reinforced under governmental incentives, in parallel with an architectural practice that diversified. Nevertheless, if architecture, as a cultural discourse, seemed to follow closely market logics and policies in place, a detailed analysis shows that, in reality, transfer of cultural discourse's content and goals did indeed occur.

Early Departmentalization (1946-81): Direct Transfer

"It is not possible to be a tiny dot isolated on the earth; one must belong to a constitutive Whole."
Charles de Gaulle, 1946³⁸

Chronologically, decolonization happened in the immediate aftermaths of World War Two for the French Antilles. Contrary to most of the colonies at that time, the French Antilles were not calling for independence but, since 1870, for 'assimilation', that is full integration with metropolitan France. This wish came true under the leadership of Aimé Césaire in 1946³⁹ but with an immediate restriction

35 Creole is the name given to the second generation of islanders, and the following ones, descended from the earlier settlers (whether they be colonizers or slaves).

36 This is basically the phenomenon at the origin of the rivalry of Basse-Terre and Pointe-à-Pitre, the two main cities of Guadeloupe.

37 See their assessments in the precise field of housing improvement between 1950 and 2000 in Karine Dupré, *Caribbean Urban Modernization* (Tampere: DATUTOP, 2004), 154-155.

38 CAOM, bib, som, c/br/6327. Guadeloupe, 1946-1971, 25 years of departmentalisation Report.

39 Assimilation law on March 19, 1946 applicable to Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guyana and La Reunion. Legifrance.

that had more than one consequence.⁴⁰ Overseas departments are subject to national laws and decrees but “can also be subject to adapted schemes needed by their particular situation”.⁴¹ Basically, and officially, titles and forms of colonization disappeared but central government with representatives in the overseas department remains valid. In Guadeloupe, the Second World War had few impacts on the existing urban landscape. However, the change in status introduced a period of vast reorganization in the island, since changing the status of the island also meant renewing its legal framework. This was particularly needed in the urban and architectural fields⁴² because of the transformation of the economy (the decline of rural activities in favour of tertiary activities: tourism and services) and a remodelling of the size of the biggest agglomerations (transformed by high population growth and rural exodus). Regulating and planning the city became a major necessity. Under colonial rule, Guadeloupe was already subject to a legal system, defined in its general lines by the central government and in detail by local officials. Because of the natural qualities of its surroundings, ravaged more than once by natural disasters, and the underlying concepts of French colonization (more interested in profit than in developing new human settlements), conclusions were drawn that colonial urban development was influenced more by individuals, and local town regulations strongly aimed at resisting the next hurricane or earthquake, rather than by national policy, even though some documents prove that the local application of national regulations existed.⁴³ However, what marked the legal system in the post-colonial period was the central government’s complete intervention in Guadeloupean urban development. This actually occurred during the period when urban planning acquired its full dimensions in the metropolitan France via post-war reconstruction, due to the necessity of economic revitalization and housing development. The entire metropolitan legislative and bureaucratic system was put in place in Guadeloupe, characterized by a strong central government policy aiming at the modernization and development of an urban society and at standardizing housing conditions, for which reproduction of French norms were the absolute standard. Whether in France or Guadeloupe, the same procedures and regulatory tools governed housing and urban developments. In less than forty years (1946–81) Guadeloupe attained most of the urban standards met in metropolitan France,⁴⁴ although it was truly only after 1958 that a real development policy with the necessary means started in Guadeloupe,⁴⁵ due to the dismantling of the French colonial empire during the 1950s–60s that allowed the central government to renew its interest in the Old Colonies. More pragmatically, as in France, concrete towers and endless wires providing electricity, inside toilets and bathrooms appeared in post-war Guadeloupe, symbolizing

40 For further information, see f. ex. Bambridge, Tamatoa et al., *La France et les Outre-Mers*, Revue Hermes, n° 32-33, CNRS Edition, 2002.

41 Clause 73 of the 1946’s Constitution, Legifrance.

42 For a more political and economic approach, see, for example, W. Miles, “Fifty years of Assimilation” and Justin Daniel, “The construction of dependency”, both in Ramos and Rivera, *Islands at the Crossroads*, 45-79.

43 Dupré, *Caribbean Urban Modernization*, 262-6.

44 See detailed numbers in Dupré, *Caribbean Urban Modernization*, 154-55.

45 Jean-Claude Giacottino, “Croissance urbaine et développement aux Antilles” in *Espaces tropicaux n°4*, ed. Pierre Vennetier (Talence: CEGET-CNRS, 1991), 89.

modernity, metropolitan comfort and hygiene for all, and French “égalité”. But these projects were still conceived and designed in France or in Guadeloupe by metropolitans who would stay only for a few months. Thus, except for a few palm trees and a few attempts at reinterpretation in a more exotic context, architectural drawings were quite similar on each side of the ocean. Nonetheless, the influence on smaller towns’ architecture was also visible. The traditional separation of the main body of the house from the kitchen and ‘wet’ rooms that was in use to prevent fire or water risks was replaced by fully integrated houses, along with the introduction of electricity and running water. Furthermore, wooden houses were shunned for concrete box-like houses. Concrete as a building material largely dominated by the end of the 1970s, while balconies or bay windows facing the sea became more frequent. Moreover, the decline of the rural economy in the 1950s–60s in favour of tourism, which developed strongly in the 1970s, favoured the construction of buildings that from their outside, presented many features in common with those on the French Riviera during the same period. It became obvious then, that all these transformations, which were direct consequences of the assimilation policy that was promoted by central government, expressed an oriented cultural discourse in which metropolitan architecture was a direct model for architecture to be designed in Guadeloupe.

Hybridization

Yet, typological case studies of two different cities of Guadeloupe between 1928 and 2003 have proven that, with small variants, floor plans were maintained throughout the period of investigation (fig. 3).⁴⁶ This is the evidence of an existing underground movement of persistence and adaptation, if not hybridization as described by Glissant.⁴⁷ Furthermore, by the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s, a growing resistance to conventional public opinion emerged. In fact, with the desire to contest both governmental policies and the consequences of the economic market’s orientation, architecture also became a tool of dissent for a few. Indeed, several years after some members of the Guadeloupian independence movement traumatised the island (riots and subsequent trials of 1976), with *Kaz Antiyé jan moun ka rété* (*Caribbean Popular Dwelling*)⁴⁸ a book was published that literally shook the intellectual world of the island. For the first time the question of meaning of architecture in the Caribbean islands was asked, and most of all, a new way of looking at the issue was proposed. The authors, Berthelot and Gaume, both architects, claimed that traditional architecture should be considered an intrinsic element of Guadeloupian identity and culture. The fact that this book was released shortly after the election of Francois Mitterrand, the implementer

46 Dupré, *Caribbean Urban Modernization*, 264–65.

47 Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981).

48 Jacques Berthelot and Martine Gaume, *Kaz Antiyé jan moun ka rété* (*Caribbean Popular Dwelling*) (Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe: Ed. Perspectives Créoles; Paris: Ed. Caribéennes, 1982). Berthelot (architect, member of the Guadeloupian independence movement), later died in the explosion of the bomb he was transporting.

of French decentralization, could partly explain its impact, with a national recognition,⁴⁹ but this is another story that cannot be addressed here.

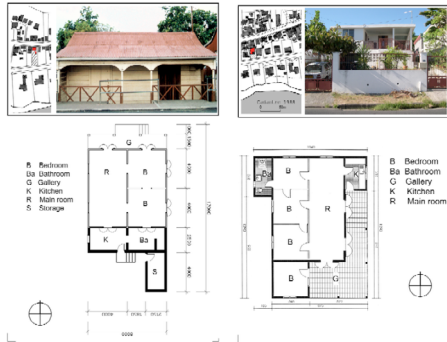


Fig. 3. Example of the persistence of floor plan albeit change of material. Left building was built c1920, right building 1988. Survey by Karine Dupré, 2004.

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the profound difference in ideology and content between colonization and departmentalization, the underlying form of governance of both systems reveals quite troubling similarities in the implemented processes but significant differences in the ways modernization was translated in the architectural discourse. However, the meaning of the concept itself was not questioned. Under the colonial period, modernization revealed individualism and institutional arrangements at the local level which evidently impacted the initial translation of the architectural discourse, until the imposition of models forced their appropriation, constructing new social meanings and order (see the role of concrete in that respect). However, in the early departmentalization the direct transfer of models and their non-translation initiated a profound questioning of the ideologies and practices at stake. As such, architecture as a cultural discourse proves its relevance to the discussion of power relations and the shaping of societal meanings.

⁴⁹ With an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, the same year.