"Moroccan Architecture of the 20th Century" and Public Space:
A Viewpoint for Localizing Colonial Heritage

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Introduction – Colonial Heritage and Public Space

To discuss colonial rule and its heritage holds difficulties that surpass the simple fact of their historical importance. For about 50 years, post-colonial studies have clarified the history and structure by which the colonizing countries and societies discriminated against the colonized people, the ruptures and conflicts within the colonized societies, and the duality and flexibility with which individuals made decisions within the limits of the time and the society. These accounts show visions of multiple actors, but are often different from not only the government's position but also the shape of memory of the society; this has sometimes evoked an emotional backlash or research on a different country in a different era could often require that connections be made with contemporary social issues.

The research on the history of French colonial rule has also progressed over several decades. The fact that the idea of the "civilizing mission" legitimized the domination of other nations under the Republic, and that there were several positions for both colonial and colonised people has been revealed[1]. These results linked with laws on indemnification for colonial soldiers, or recognition of the slave trade as crimes against humanity, but also included a law which contained an article on education about the positive side of French rule.[2] There is also a discussion among historians as to whether it is possible to treat history as a field of politic.[3]

In that sense, the interpretation of constructions built in the colonial period is always queried on its positionality. Positively evaluating the value of constructions is different from supporting colonial rule, but sometimes it might be treated as the same issue and blamed as if it were. In this article, I will report a Non-Profit Organization in Casablanca, Morocco, which tries to protect the constructions of the colonial era. I have to confess that I initially thought that the meaning of their activity with its connection to French rule derived from its influence on their mentality. However, what we can see in this instance is the very simple fact that an evaluation of a building is not the same in every era, and that the use of buildings differs at different times in history. Buildings are used in different ways by multiple people, and acquire new meanings as time passes.

Morocco became a protectorate of France and Spain in 1912, and gained independence in

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1956. Casablanca developed rapidly during this relatively short period. The public space at the center of the city, which is now the object of re-evaluation, was created with prestigious buildings. Its centrality in the city now has the effect of increasing accessibility. No small number of people visit these buildings, which gives them the meaning of being a part of the public heritage. In this paper, I will discuss the efforts to retrieve colonial heritage as citizens' own public property through the activities of an NPO that facilitates this process.

1. Four spaces created under French rule

Casablanca became a window for commerce with Europe in the middle of the 19th century. After 1907, as France took advantage of this area and laid the foundations for its domination, European industries started to increase.[4] When Hubert Lyautay became the first General Resident, disordered urbanization was already underway. He designated Henri Prost who, as a master architect of urban planning in Moroccan cities, had received the prize – the *Grand Prix de Rome*. An architect who worked with Prost, Albert Laprade, left an essay in which he remembered that Prost had arrived with a three-month mandate and left ten years later.[5]

Prost, who had participated in an association – the *Musée Social* – which gathered together researchers for social reform, introduced zoning in Casablanca to improve sanitary conditions and separated the residential areas from industrial areas (Figure 1). Downwind of the latter, he planned factories, railways, cemeteries, slaughter house, and barracks. Europeans were not supposed to enter the old city – called the *médina* in the local language – which was separated from the new city lived in by Europeans, so as not to "diffuse" its sanitary situation (Figure 2).

The European commercial and residential area created in this way became a city with an *Art Déco* design which was popular in Europe in that period (Figure 3) and has a landscape that is very similar to European cities.

In one area of this European city, there was a quarter for the garrison. Prost planned to change this to an administrative block. Around the square, public sector buildings like the post office, city hall, bank, etc. were distributed, and an equestrian statue of Lyautay was erected in the center. The prestigious buildings around the square were designed by French architects, and they partially adopted local motifs (Figures 4, 5, 6). For example, the green roof tiles,
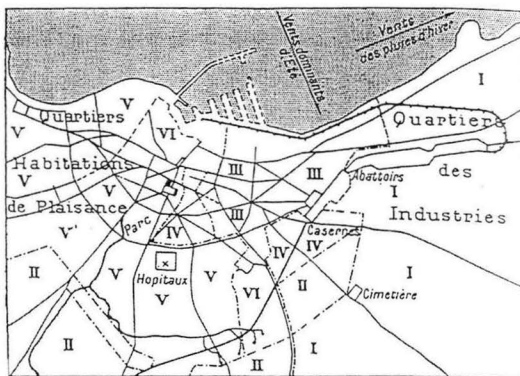

Figure 1. Zoning of Casablanca

(Cited from Cohen et Eleb 1998)

Figure 2. Old Postcard of Casablanca

Figure 3. European area

Figure 4. Post Office

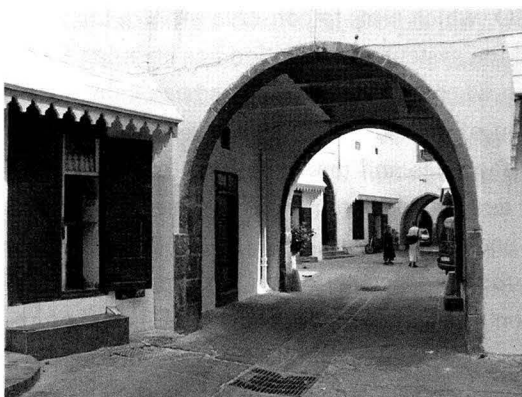Figure 5. City Hall

Figure 6. Bank

Figure 7. Habous District

which had been used for religious buildings, and local mosaics called *zellige*, ironworks, etc. were used somewhere in them.

Prost also created a residential area for local people (shown as VI in Figure 1, in the internal area). It was designed in "Arabic style" using the traditional houses of Rabat and Salé as a model, and a European sanitary system was also introduced[6] (Figure 7). It is called "Habous district" because it used a North-African religious fund of the same name, and two architects,

August Cadet, and Edmond Brion, carefully elaborated it. This area was lived in by relatively wealthy people.

Workers who streamed into Casablanca could not find enough places to live in the old médina and the Habous district alone. The *nouvelle médina*, the city for locals, was expanded, but people could not be enclosed in these places and instead formed *bidonvilles*, or squatter settlements. Laprade, among architects of the period who wrote a great deal about Morocco, said that no one could imagine such a large increase in the population.[7] After the Second World War, another architect, Michel Ecochard, made an effort to reduce the bidonvilles. He planned to mass produce houses in keeping with the idea that houses for locals should be Arabic. As a result, a suburban area was created with simple houses.

Thus, during 40 years of French rule, four types of urban spaces were created in Casablanca: the old médina, the new city for Europeans, the nouvelle médina including the Habous district, and a suburban area. The composition of these four urban spaces with very different landscapes is the basis of Casablanca today.

2. *Casamémoire* and Moroccan architecture of the 20th century

After independence, until the 1980s, urban planning in Casablanca focused on eliminating the bidonvilles and people ignored buildings under French control. The policy to protect historic constructions was introduced in the protectorate period,[8] but modern buildings in Casablanca were not involved. The actor who brought a new movement was an NPO, Casamémoire. This group, which was founded in 1995, tries to establish the value of buildings constructed under French control and to promote their protection.

In the background, there is a global movement concerned with the protection of modern architecture. The DOCOMOMO, which aims to conserve modern architecture and its documentation, was founded in 1988, and the system of protection has been legislated in a number of countries. It is related to the situation where some distance has been gained from the period of modernization concerning conversion of industrial structures in developed countries, and there is a need to commercialize former factories and unused mines for tourism. Casamémoire also wants to create a core for tourism and urban planning using Casablanca's modern buildings[9] and it has begun research to protect and exploit them.

As I mentioned earlier, the Art Déco style was prevalent in Europe in the protectorate period, and there is a concentration of this style in Casablanca. Casamémoire investigates buildings one by one, lists the important ones, works with the government to protect them, and increases their value by publishing guidebooks and organizing events to inform people of their importance. Before they began their activities, some Art Déco buildings had been destroyed, but in 2003, 23 of them became the objects of protection of the Ministry of Culture.[10] They are classified as "architecture of the 20th century," rather than of the "protectorate period." In a guidebook titled *Guide to architecture of the 20th century of Casablanca,* which Casamémoire published in 2011, 98 constructions including three anterior to the 19th century are presented.

Are there any objections to protecting buildings that recall French rule? In the interview with Casamémoire,[11] they said that there were "nationalists," however, they were very small in

number. On what basis can their activities be supported? To consider this question, we may turn to an event organized by the NPO – the "Casablanca Heritage Days."

3. Casablanca Heritage Days

The buildings that Casamémoire tries to protect are both public and private; they are used for work or living, and people normally cannot visit them. The NPO organizes an event named the "Casablanca Heritage Days" with the city of Casablanca, the Ministry of Culture, the *Institut Français*, and the agglomeration of Casablanca, when people are allowed entry to public buildings, with the cooperation of a number of organizations. The event covers the old médina, the central part of the European city, and the Habous district, and some suburban buildings are also open depending on the year. What will be described here are my observations when I participated in this event in 2012.

The old médina is not only intricate and complex, but composed of many private spaces where nonresidents are not welcomed. If visitors are lost, they may bother residents, so Casamémoire provides a guided tour (Figure 8). In 2012, musical or magic performances for local children were also offered. Through examining the history of every building, the guide explained that the old médina cannot be understood as only in the Moroccan tradition; the continuous influence of Europe in features such as balconies which are not common in other Moroccan old cities indicates that Casablanca has had historically profound relations with other civilizations. The old médina of Casablanca has no lengthy history as cultural heritage itself, but if the functions of the European features are emphasized, a new evaluation appears from another perspective.

In the former European district, a guide waits in front of every building opened to the public in the central city, and people can visit with or without the guide (Figure 9). In each building, explanations are focused on the building's details, and especially on the workmanship, rather than the whole design or the architect's name. For example, in the city hall, the guide explained that the tile work used on the pillar was hand-crafted by Moroccan craftsmen, and the color was influenced by impressionism, or that partitions of the office were well elaborated, and there was no distortion even now because of the Moroccan art. In the tribunal court, another guide explained that there were very fine tile and iron works. In the bank, the explanation was that there were wonderful handmade wooden handrails on the staircase, and that on the front floor, people used white Carrara marble to display status along with green Moroccan marble. That is, the

Figure 8. Guided Tour in the Old Medina

Figure 9. Inside of the City Hall with Guide

Figure 10. In the Habous district

buildings are understood as Moroccan fabrications rather than having been left by the French. In fact, there was even a guide who explained that Moroccan craftsmen willingly participated in these projects.

In the Habous district, there was a guided tour because it is also a complex configuration, if not one comparable to the old médina. There the guide explained how the French architect, August Cadet, planned the whole design of this district, which was accepted by locals, and how local craftsmen made an effort to materialize this city without a help of European money (Figure 10). On the whole, the history of French rule is relativized, and people are trying to revise the ways of understanding the city of Casablanca within the context of the longer history of Morocco.

In a conference held at the event, speakers discussed the built environment of Casablanca in the larger global context. The urban planning of the colonial age in other countries was presented, and there was a discussion about the same problems (for example, bidonvilles), which occurred in the same period, even in France. The activities of Casamémoire are aimed exactly at re-interpreting the buildings of Casablanca in alternative ways.

The number of participants to this event approached 21,642 in 2016 according to the organizers.[12] The events are not only for adults, but for school programs, and there is also a stamp-collecting game for children. Through these programs, the NPO aims to increase the residents' affection and pride in their city. Guides are mainly volunteers, and wear the same T-shirt on which is written the words, "volunteers for my heritage." It is not "our" but "my" heritage. On the flyer of the 2013 event, they say "Please discover the heritage of your town." In doing so, they aim to change the consciousness and the historical view of their city.

Concluding remarks

In 2013, the city of Rabat was inscribed on the world heritage list with the name "Modern Capital and Historic City: A Shared Heritage." Rabat became the capital under French control and the new city was constructed by the French, so it could be seen that Morocco was a positive country that accepted the history of colonization. However, when we consider the case of Casablanca, we can say that the background logic is not so simple as taking a colonial perspective. I would like to note some particular points of view on this matter.

First, Morocco was not a colony but a protectorate. France retained the sultan and decisions were ultimately made with his signature. In reality, sultans rarely refused the French decisions, but the difference in how this system was ruled may not be inconsequential. Baudez and Béguin, who undertook a research on colonial urban planning compared Algeria with Morocco and described the first as the style of the conqueror, the latter as the style of the protector.[13] They stated that in the style of the conqueror, the French showed their power to the locals through construction, but in the style of the protector, they refrained from destroying the local culture. As we saw above, the division of urban spaces that France created served the convenience of governance[14], but the means of keeping a distance from the local culture would eventually lead to a positive understanding of actual buildings and urban landscapes. It is possible to say that the French ruling style facilitated the realization of the continuity of Moroccan culture.

In addition, the protection of modern architecture is shown in a global movement in these days. Moroccan cities that rapidly modernized in the first half of the 20th century are a treasure trove of modern architecture. It is possible that architects who had a chance to study in Europe or the United States, and who had a connection with global academic networks, realized the richness of architecture in Casablanca and wanted it to inform local people. Buildings with value are mainly situated in the former European district where investment was concentrated, but now this area can simply be seen as the "central city."

Furthermore, what seems the most important to me is the length of time already 100 years these buildings have existed. They are precisely a part of the old history of Morocco. The expression "Moroccan architecture of the 20th century" is a restructured recognition of historicity beyond a superficial revision of "colonial buildings." It is also important that they use "my" or "your" rather than "our" in the messages of the event. This protection should be supported by the affection of every citizen, and not merely be an evaluation by the government or specialists. If the citizens accept the buildings by visiting them, new public meanings can be created. The buildings in the central city were prestigious when they were constructed, but now the centrality of their position allows people easy access. If citizens visit them one by one, the buildings will continually gain even greater public value.

If we think of the situation like this, seeing the buildings just as part of the history of colonialism may be a biased way of seeing. As I mentioned it in the beginning, the meaning of a construction changes over the course of history. Through the interventions of citizens, it can be possible to create new public meanings.

On the other hand, with respect to the new meanings of public space, the social classes that can participate in the event may be limited. Even if there is a program of tours for schools, evaluating architecture is an elite act. The performance for children in the old médina during the Casablanca Heritage Days worked by absorbing the extraordinariness of the guided tours, but it did not connect to the understanding of the buildings. An inclusive approach might be, perhaps, a subject for Casablanca in the future.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1) Chikako Hirano and other researchers of French history are introducing these fruits in Japan. Ex. Hirano C., *History of French Colonialism*. Jinbunshoin, 2002.

2) The article was heatedly criticized by former colonial countries and the national assembly decided to remove it one year after its adoption.

3) See Matsunuma, Miho, 2007, L'histoire, la mémoire et la loi – la controverse autour du passé colonial en France d'aujourd'hui. *European Studies*, pp.119-132.

4) Cohen, Jean-Louis et Eleb, Monique, 1998, *Casablanca : Mythes et figures d'une aventure urbain*, Editions Hazan / Editions Belvisi, pp.33-39.

5) Laprade, Albert, *Lyautey, urbaniste : Souvenirs d'un témoin*, Horizons de France, 1934, p.9.

6) Laprade described it in this way: "the General Resident of France was a leader (...) considering the natives not as despicable subjects, but as men worthy of being respected and loved." (Laprade, Albert, Une ville créée spécialement pour les indigènes à Casablanca, in Jean Royer(dir.), *L'Architecture et l'urbanisme aux colonies et dans les pays tropicaux. Communications et rapports du congrès international de l'urbanisme aux colonies et dans les pays de latitude intertropicale*, vol.1, La Charité-sur-Loire, Delayance, 1932-1935.)It shows that the sanitary system was seen as a symbol of civilization.

7) Preface of the book Cadet, A., 1953, *La Mahakma de Casablanca*, Paul Hartmann.

8) Belatik, Mohamed, 2003, Le patrimoine culturel marocain : richesse et diversité, In. Gaultier-Kurhan, Caroline, (dir.) *Patrimoine culturel marocain*, Maisonneuve & Larose, pp.17-37.

9) See interview of Amina Alaoui, the first president of Casamémoire: Daoud, Zakya, 2005, *Casablanca en mouvement : Des innovateurs dans la ville*, Autrement, pp.128-135.

10) Ibid. p.131.

11) September, 2011.

12) http://www.journeesdupatrimoine.ma/ (December 23, 2016).

13) Baudez, Guidas and François Béguin, 1980, Arabisances: Observations on French colonial architecture in North Africa between 1900 and 1950. *Lotus international*, 26, pp.41-52.

14) I do not support the idea in which France tried to protect local urban structure. If it is true that the French were attracted to Moroccan civilization, urban planning was aimed at the dispassionate control of the local society.