

ABSTRACT

Constitutionally French, geographically Caribbean: the conundrum of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane

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By their constitutional status as *départements d'outre-mer*, or Overseas Departments of France, the Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe and the South American territory of Guyane are exemplary theatres for the observation of the French philosophy of assimilation at work. Martiniquans, Guadeloupeans and Guyanais are French and the *départements français d'Amérique* (DFA) 'parts' of France and the European Union, with all that that implies in terms of standard of living, and social and political opportunities. This thesis tests the degree to which the assimilation of these Caribbean territories into a metropolitan power has contributed to their development or social transformation.

The results show that the developmentalist policies pursued in the DFA have indeed bequeathed on them a sophisticated, expensive lifestyle. They have however not encouraged sustained, autonomous development. The marvel is that amidst this opulence, the DFA suffer from economic destructuration and the same ills that plague 'underdeveloped' Caribbean society: chronic unemployment, intractable balance-of-payments deficits and emigration for personal development.

Moreover, acculturation of Martiniquans, Guadeloupeans and Guyanais has led to profound psychosocial dualism and dependency that have been effective impediments to the flourishing of an unfettered sense of national autonomy. The DFA are indoctrinated into a system designed by others for others from an entirely different social, ethnic and natural environment. Their "misdevelopment" is a direct result of flawed social policies. *Départementalisation* has progressively diluted those very ontological factors which fuel national growth: a clear sense of identity and purposeful self-reliance.

The thesis acknowledges that social sophistication, a high standard of education, political pluralism and sharp civic awareness, all classic trademarks of French society, are omnipresent in the DFA. However, in a socio-political scenario which sees them only as "parts" of France in the Caribbean, the Antillo-Guyanais (as Martiniquans, Guadeloupeans and Guyanais are collectively called) are impeded from bringing about, with reference to their own ethos, their genuine national development. The very status which has provided them with the social "assets" enumerated above appears to be the chief obstacle to their using these assets to engender their autonomous development in harmony with their Caribbean being. This thesis submits that for this development to take place, the DFA will have to struggle for a separate space for their *spécificité* (in Aimé Césaire's terms), upon which platform they may then renegotiate with France the parameters of their integration.

Key words: assimilation; colonialism; Eurocentricity; dependency; dualism; developmentalism; paradox; *spécificité*