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Michael James Miller, *The Representation of Place: Urban Planning and Protest in France and Great Britain, 1950-1980.* Burlingon, Vermont and Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003. Illustrations, photographs, bibliography, and index. xv + 347 pp. $85.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-75-460653-8.

Review by Michael Seidman, University of North Carolina-Wilmington.

In the introductory chapter, Michael James Miller seeks to put the "sociocultural products called places" (p. 2) at the center of his investigation of urban social movements. Miller asserts that the concept of place lends itself to the litany of contemporary academic categories--"gender, race, ethnicity, class, culture" (p. 6). His book "looks at how place and place-based identities are employed by various groups at a local (rather than national) level" during the "crisis of the modernist paradigm in urban planning in Western Europe in the 1970s" (p. 7). Linguistic representation structures reality. Thus, during this crisis "a 'slum' may be transformed into a 'neighborhood' or '*quartier*' without any substantial change in its material conditions" (p. 27). He examines two urban protest movements--one, in Alma-Gare, a district of Roubaix; the other, in the Gorbals, an area of Glasgow.

The second chapter, "Changing attitudes to the built environment: Urban planning in France and Great Britain," ably compares the decentralized planning tradition in Britain with its more centralized counterpart in France. Between 1945 and 1950, Britain constructed five to six times more housing than France. However, the *rénovation urbaine* that began in 1958 under the Third Plan initiated "the most important restructuring of French urban centers since Haussman's [sic] restructuring of Paris under Napoleon III" (p. 50). In both nations, the fifties and early sixties saw the planning profession rise to a pinnacle of prestige, only to decline in the late sixties and throughout the seventies. During this period, architects and planners abandoned their previous functionalism to create a more participatory "community."

Chapter three, "The *courées* of Roubaix: Constructing a Consensus," explores the nineteenth and twentieth-century history of Roubaix and its Alma-Gare district. Much of the working-class housing of Alma-Gare took the form of the *courée*, a diminutive of *cour* ("courtyard"). Miller does a fine job showing the connections among the labyrinthine space of the *courées* and working-class life and struggles in Roubaix. Urban renewal in the post-World War II period meant that more prosperous workers could move from the *courées*, but other residents--the unskilled, immigrants, unemployed--remained stuck in substandard housing. May 1968 and its aftermath stimulated a new protest movement designed to win decent housing for all. The Association Populaire Familiale, which had begun in the early fifties as part of the catholic youth movement, led the protests in the late sixties and early seventies. In the late seventies, socialist politicians took up the cause of urban renewal. They inaccurately claimed that "capitalists" had constructed the "slums" of Alma-Gare to exploit workers; whereas the historical evidence showed that small investors and *rentiers* had been the housing developers. The left agreed that the *municipalité* should offer slum dwellers a new and modern *quartier*. Not all residents of Alma-Gare concurred. Opponents claimed not only the right to remain in their homes if they wished but also to be offered "something more than mass-produced modernist architecture" (p. 131).

Chapter four focuses on the movement in the Alma-Gare. In 1973, the Association Populaire Familiale launched the Atelier Populaire d'Urbanisme (APU) "to address socioeconomic issues connected with the domestic realm" (p. 135). In 1976, the Ministry of Equipment offered the APU a contract, the first of its

kind in France, which provided both government funding and access to information. In 1977, various governmental and grass-roots organizations "accepted the concept of partial rehabilitation" of the housing stock of Alma-Gare (p. 144). The APU had successfully opposed the functionalist conception of renewal (which it labeled "*cages à lapins*") and had been able to impose its demands for the enrichment of social life in a new urban environment. The APU initiated the *atelier cuisine cooperative*, a restaurant designed to foster sociability. Miller claims that the APU's actions provided the population with "a collective identity" (p. 147), although it is not clear how many residents were involved in its activities nor how representative they were. Nevertheless, the APU's rhetoric of "us" (Alma-Gare residents) and "them" (outsiders, experts, officials) was effective in creating a local identity (p. 153) or, at the least, "the myth of a cohesive community" (p. 168).

The APU authored a Marxist history of the *courées*: "To ensure the reproduction of the workforce there had been a division of labour between the bourgeoisie and the petite-bourgeoisie, whereby the former invested in industrial activity and the latter invested in a specific form of '*capitalisme rentier*'"(p. 168). Paradoxically, though, the *courées* encouraged a class-conscious social existence that local capitalists found dangerous to their interests. The *courées* offered low rents, proximity to work, and a healthy worker solidarity. Marxists asserted that they were not slums but breeding grounds of class and communal struggle. The bourgeoisie therefore began to attack the *courées* as unsanitary and unhygienic. Yet given the depressed economic situation of Roubaix, the decline of Alma-Gare's *courées* was inevitable: "The passageways and staircases which had been intended to perpetuate the vibrant life of the community became dark and threatening obstacles to be negotiated by the population, vandalism increased, residents failed to appropriate semi-private spaces such as the walkways in front of their houses, drugs became an increasingly serious problem" (p. 187). In the 1980s Alma-Gare once again was seen to have declined into a dangerous "slum."

Chapters five and six examine the history of the Gorbals district of Glasgow. The city was closely associated with the expansion of British commerce and industry in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1851, the last year of the Great Famine in Ireland, some 20 percent of the city's population was Irish by birth. In the 1880s, Singer founded the world's largest sewing machine factory downstream from Glasgow. Industrial and housing decline accelerated after the Second World War. The Gorbals became a notorious "slum," and the principal activities of its inhabitants appeared to be fighting and drinking. In the late 1950s, redevelopers began to construct "low rise" blocks to improve life in what was considered to be the most crowded city in Western Europe. Much of the population felt that the loss of family, friends, and local pubs--what was summed up by the overused word, community--was worth the price of new living quarters. However, as in Alma-Gare, not all residents welcomed the renewal, and some--especially the elderly--resisted moving to high and low rises. Rent strikes and demonstrations erupted over higher rates in the new flats.

Dampness in the new buildings became a key issue in the 1970s. In 1977, the Anti-Dampness campaign organized its largest meeting, attended by 1,000 Gorbals tenants. The movement rejected the charge that tenants' lifestyles or negligence were responsible for the wetness and jokingly advised the residents that their "heavy breathing causes dampness" (p. 259). The headline of *The Gorbals View* ran, "Free Sponge With Every Council House! 1 out of every 5 council houses suffer from dampness = is this why Maggie Thatcher calls council tenants spongers?" (p. 305). Irony and rent strikes made the Anti-Dampness campaign successful in the Gorbals. Still, in the mid 1980s, at least 38 percent of Glasgow housing stock suffered from some kind of condensation or dampness. Unlike Alma-Gare, "the private landlord could no longer be depicted as the exploiter of the working class; rather, the problem lay squarely on the shoulders of Glasgow's socialist municipality, a victim, in part, of its own long-term, low-rent policy which had denied it the financial resources necessary to maintain its housing stock" (p. 206).

I have several minor criticisms. First, the concentration on place perhaps leads the author to ignore those who were not attached to it. Thus the study assumes *enracinés* rather than *déracinés*. Second, Miller's prose also sometimes exhibits pious verbosity: "The position adopted in this book is that it is social actors who enjoy hegemony in the exercise of power relations who are best positioned to ascribe to, promote and maintain their construction of place" (p. 9). This said, Miller's work is a highly competent comparative history of two neighborhood protest movements in two major European urban areas. He is rightly skeptical about the rhetoric of government planners, movement activists, and nostalgic individuals who sought to reconstruct a "community" that may have never existed. "The built environment is not simply a physical manifestation of socioeconomic activities; it is a culturally laden landscape in which buildings are recipients of meaning, sometimes complementary, often contradictory" (p. 303).

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