

Rosemary Wakeman, *Modernizing the Provincial City: Toulouse, 1945-1975*. Cambridge Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1997. xii + 323 pp. Illustrations, notes, and index. \$45.00 US (cl.). ISBN 0-674-58072-9.

Review by W. Scott Haine, Holy Names College, Oakland, California, for H-France, November 1999.

This superb study of the twentieth-century French provincial city of Toulouse will hopefully inspire study of others, such as Lyon or Bordeaux. Wakeman provides a most perceptive analyses of modernization and urbanization during the "thirty glorious years" of France's post-World War II expansion. She shows how French urbanists, especially under Charles de Gaulle, aspired to transform Toulouse and its environs, long considered as the epitome of provincial backwardness, into an advanced industrial city. This is not a simple story of progression versus stagnation but is, instead, one of "negotiation" between modernization and traditional urban culture (which she terms the "vernacular"). She concludes that the authoritarian and rigid plans of a centralizing modernist urbanism could not subdue Toulouse's supple, crafty, and adaptive ethos. Post-1945 French urbanism emerges as an ironic and dialectical process in which centralizing homogeneous tendencies elicit local flexible and variegated responses. Local mentalities may be transformed, Wakeman shows, without being extinguished.

The study's great strength resides in its contextualization. Wakeman first traces Toulousian history through the 1950s, then explores Toulouse's longstanding and distinctive identity: its Roman heritage, its regional Occitanian cultural legacy, the northern crusade against the Albigensians and their subsequent annexation by the French monarchy, the prominence of the university in Toulouse, and its status as the provincial capital of Languedoc. Administrative changes in the wake of the 1789 Revolution demoted Toulouse to the rank of a mere departmental capital. The city was also bypassed by the other great transformative process of the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution.

The pace of change accelerated after 1900, however. Toulouse became a center of aviation and, during the Great War, a center for the production of aircraft and chemicals. The city's singular cultural history is epitomized by the distinctive red clay bricks used in its buildings before 1900, the sociable street culture of its small shopkeepers and artisans, and its political heritage of left-wing politics. Wakeman's deft treatment of this heritage highlights the hollow pretensions of post-1945 urbanism which presumed that history could be ignored. She untangles the complex web of meaning around such terms as region, municipalism, and modernization

finding these expressions "multifold and mercurial"(p. 68). She also uncovers the multilayered strata of signification around these terms in the works of conservatives, radicals, socialists, thinkers, and politicians from the mid-nineteenth century through the Vichy and Resistance periods. After thus delineating the history and ambiguity in the Toulousian urban fabric, she then moves to the heart of her study.

The era of the 1950s in Toulouse was one of lost opportunities and economic necessities. The socialist mayor, Raymond Badiou, wishing to avoid the chaotic suburban sprawl of the interwar period, supported a plan by the École de Beaux-Arts trained architect Charles-Henri Nicod to create broad boulevards which would channel growth and respect the traditional urban fabric. This balanced, humanistic plan was unfortunately shelved due to an acute housing shortage. Instead, high-rise apartment complexes, bland white ten and sometimes twenty storey high boxes, were quickly constructed to meet the soaring demand and within the decade housed more than 60,000 people. At one point central government technocrats wished to demolish the entire neighborhood of Saint Georges. Although grass-roots agitation among shopkeepers, artisans, and the poor, limited the extent of the renovation, affluent newcomers moved into the renovated areas. The arrival of de Gaulle's Fifth Republic in 1958 resulted in Badiou's eclipse and the rise of another socialist mayor, Louis Bazerque. Unlike his predecessor, Bazerque championed the rapid industrialization and urban expansion (via aeronautics and chemicals) promised by the new regime. Bazerque believed that both his own future and that of Toulouse were safe in the hands of Parisian technocrats.

The 1960s brought the high tide of Gaullist modernization. Wakeman delineates the rise of Gaullist "technobureaucratic dominion" and the decline of "democratic municipalism" (p. 113). Badiou's strategy of high density and controlled growth was replaced by a Gaullist plan which focused on regional development. Aeronautics and electronic industries, Gaullist technocrats decreed, would be the seed industries to stimulate growth not only in Toulouse but also in the surrounding region. As part of the nationwide network of Zones à urbaniser par Priorité (ZUP), two major projects were given priority. Southwest of the old central city, Le Mirail was to be the "ideal" suburb. Designed by an associate of Le Corbusier, Le Mirail would avoid the sterility of high-rise living, by restoring the street to the center of social life and surrounding these pedestrian walkways with shops and other public amenities. This experiment in animation quickly flopped because of inadequate state financing, cumbersome regulations discouraging private investment, and inadequate transportation. Lack of highway access, in particular, caused the failure of the biggest mall in France. By the early 1970s Le Mirail was a mere shell of its projected self and became instead the site of isolated public housing. In contrast, Rangueil-Lespinet, developed in the southeastern section of the metropolitan region, was a moderate success. This high-

tech center received generous funding from Gaullist urbanists, and attracted a strong contingent of professors, scientists, and specialists. Due to the monotony of building style and the lack of cultural amenities, however, these cadres failed to become attached to the community. Only high salaries kept many residents in what they considered to be a provincial backwater.

Wakeman also explores the evolution of artisans and small shopkeepers. These small economic units, which epitomized pre-1945 France, represented a bigger percentage of the population in Toulouse than in any other French city. The narrow, winding city streets of the central city encompassed a dense and diverse network of trades and micro-ateliers sustained by intense sociability and economic flexibility. Following a brief resurgence after World War II, these trades suffered a deeper depression in Toulouse than in any other French city. Only the construction industry boomed, due to the demand for housing. While mayor Badiou championed the artisans, centralizing technocrats viewed them as a relic of the nineteenth century when Toulouse was the market center of a depressed agricultural region, and they removed tax breaks which had sheltered these artisans and shopkeepers. By the end of the 1950s, the small entrepreneurs and their local trade associations had stopped fighting modernization and were, instead, adapting to the new competitive environment ushered in by the European Common Market.

Modernizers believed Toulouse would become a center of advanced industrialization and high technology, but these hopes proved fragile. Wakeman chronicles Toulouse's long and distinguished history of aviation, from the heroic fliers and entrepreneurs of the early twentieth century to the workers who tried to establish self-management (*autogestion*) at the end of World War II. In 1950 the aviation industry seemed in full decline but was rescued by the end of the decade by the construction of the Caravelle, France's first jet airliner. Technocrats and city planners in the 1960s felt the city's future would be secured with the construction of the supersonic jetliner, the Concorde. In the heady days of mid-1960s Gaullist optimism, electronics industries and even a space center seemed to promise even greater prosperity. Aeronautics and electronics, however, did not provide economic miracles but rather cycles of prosperity and recession. With increased oil prices and the growing ecological awareness of the 1970s, production of the Concorde fizzled and the various electronics ventures fell victim to the rapid shifts typical of this industry. Toulouse's city hall and its Chamber of Commerce scrambled to find new industries.

Wakeman's treatment of "Gentrification and the Capitalist Landscape" is simultaneously persuasive and problematic. She abundantly demonstrates that artisanal industries have cushioned Toulouse's economy against the volatility of the high-technology sector and generated substantial exports. The initiative and innovation of these artisans confounded the predictions of the Gaullist technocrats. De

Gaulle's successors as president, Georges Pompidou and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, provided tax breaks to encourage artisanal production. Although the 1973-74 oil crisis and resulting economic recession decimated artisanal ranks, the Pompidou and Giscardian governments believed artisanal creativity and flexibility could help France overcome the economic crisis. In short, modernization would now occur with rather than against artisans. The old inner city, along with the artisans, also made a comeback during the 1970s. A new mayor, Pierre Baudis, became the apostle of gentrification and promised a "human approach" to urban renewal. Old central Toulouse was re-zoned for pedestrians. Now the winding streets and antique architecture provided the perfect setting for modern leisure and sophisticated consumerism. Regional Occitain culture became a commodity for the young upwardly mobile scientists, cadres, and administrators who now dominated Toulousian society. This rebirth of the artisanal sector certainly confirms Wakeman's notion of a negotiated synthesis between the vernacular culture and modernization, but harder to discern is the triumph of this pseudo-traditionalist street life. It appears to be a classic example of the commodification of tradition with few of the original folkways retained. Wakeman notes this commodification, but does not elaborate upon how it reflects a negotiation between traditional artisanal street culture and contemporary upper-middle-class consumerism. A comparison between the lifestyle of Toulouse's artisans and the suburban managers and technicians who come to the downtown for recreation could clarify the character of this synthesis of tradition and modernity.

But this limitation does not detract from the substantial accomplishment of this book. Wakeman provides an excellent analysis of the changing class composition of the city and expertly integrates this into the larger changes in post-1945 French urban society. Since 1975 over half of the French population has lived in the largest provincial capitals, such as Toulouse; small shopkeepers and artisans are no longer a dominant part of the population but have been displaced by a salaried technical and managerial stratum. Notions of social class, sociability, and popular culture tied to neighborhoods have receded in the face of such new concepts as habitat, mobility, and lifestyle in the context of a consumer society. As a result, local politics have shifted from a reliance on class solidarity to a dependence on "technocratic managerialism"(p. 268).

Wakeman's expansive and ambitious book, both an institutional and social study, suggests several agendas for future research. For example, a long-range study of the social and psychological dynamics of the shift from living in dense urban neighborhoods to life in suburban high rises or estates could be highly illuminating. A study of the grass-roots opposition to urbanization since 1945 is also needed.

Wakeman shows that this opposition emerged from diverse social sectors--artisans, communists, the New Left of 1968--as well as historians and geographers. How have these groups responded to gentrification and to the challenges of the 1980s and 1990s? Should their ideas and action be described in terms of class or some other

frame of analysis? Finally, an instructive study in urban semiology could compare and contrast the Belle époque café Sion, demolished during the 1950s urban renewal, with a recent recreated café which Wakeman believes is of "one of the most elegant recreations of a fin-de-siècle grand café you could find in France" (p. 272). These are just a few of the topics that this rich study will no doubt generate.

W. Scott Haine
Holy Names College, Oakland California
shaine@aol.com

Copyright © 1997-2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. Maintained by H-France.