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**Marie Cartier, Isabelle Coutant, Olivier Masclet and
Yasmine Siblot 2016: The France of the Little-middles.
A Suburban Housing Development in Greater Paris.
New York and Oxford: Berghahn**

Max Rousseau

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detailed survey of a residential area populated by residents who identify as ‘little-middles’ (i.e. those at the intersection of the lower classes and the middle classes), this book contributes to a growing focus on the evolution of the *quartiers pavillonnaires* by a generation of younger scholars who—inspired by the later work of Pierre Bourdieu—conduct ethnographic surveys in areas demonstrating this general characteristic.

After a general presentation of the neighbourhood (located in Gonesse, in the northern suburbs of Paris), the book comprises five thematic chapters. The first three present three successive generations of inhabitants: the intensive social integration the neighbourhood conferred upon its first residents; the motivations behind the subsequent implantation of families from the nearby high-rise public housing estates; and the socialization provided today by the neighbourhood to its young people. The fourth chapter analyses the ambivalence of social and ethnic interactions within this now-heterogeneous neighbourhood. Finally, the fifth chapter assesses the rightward shift in voting among the white lower classes (evidenced by a survey conducted in the neighbourhood during the 2007 presidential election).

One of the main strengths of the book, which relies on numerous excerpts from interviews that give it a lively character, is to analyse the evolution of individuals’ trajectories and their relationship to the neighbourhood in the context of France’s development since the end of the *Trente Glorieuses*. Two groups are focused on in particular. The first are the ‘pioneers’, white inhabitants of modest social origins, whose establishment in the neighbourhood from the 1960s was built on the mode of social promotion and an optimistic vision of the future. Their relationship to their new environment is particularly intense, focused around various collective activities. But the first departures of the more prosperous among them from the 1970s onwards, followed by the arrival of families of immigrant origin in subsequent decades, have gradually changed the pioneers’ outlook: their neighbourhood of promotion has gradually come to be perceived as a devaluated neighbourhood and, as they grow older, they dwell more and more in the private space offered by their homes.

After the ‘pioneers’ came the ‘newcomers’ of the 1980s and 1990s, constituting a much less homogeneous group on account of their diverse social and ethnic origins. They revised the vision of this suburban quarter as a neighbourhood of social ascent, especially those arriving

from nearby public housing projects (where living conditions deteriorated significantly around this time) and others migrating from rural Turkey. For those families who, via public employment and small business ventures, have achieved modest social improvement, the desire to distance themselves from the projects and demonstrate successful integration appear to have been the primary motivations for house purchases, albeit at the price of incurring significant debt. Settlement in the neighbourhood is indeed an acceptable arrangement, insofar as geographical proximity makes it possible to control the socialization of children while retaining social links with the public housing projects.

Ultimately, although devoted to the evolution of a neighbourhood of suburban single-family homes, this book implicitly addresses almost as much the ‘France of the projects’ (to which the interviewees themselves frequently refer) as the ‘France of the little-middles’. For the international reader, the specific localization of the neighbourhood studied in this book is therefore particularly welcome. Indeed, since its original publication in 2008, most French political parties have come to adapt their strategies to tackle a much-publicized opposition between the ‘small whites’ of the urban peripheries and the gentrified cities with their multicultural suburbs. And indeed the book does not shy away from describing the daily tensions between white ‘pioneers’ and immigrant ‘newcomers’—nor the animosities among opposing groups with different immigrant backgrounds. More generally, it analyses how the emergence of a sense of downgrading among the pioneers, together with divisions within a neighbourhood formerly unified around a feeling of equality, resonate with the discourses of a radicalized right denouncing immigration and stigmatizing ‘assistantship’.

For all that, this monograph on a neighbourhood of single-family homes located near large public housing projects makes it possible to go beyond the dominant vision of a binary opposition prevailing between French territories. The book thus finely analyses the multiple interactions between suburban spaces that, despite the economic slowdown, do not appear either watertight or frozen. In this sense, the emphasis placed by this book on ‘small social mobility’ proves to be particularly fruitful, as is the nuanced analysis of the coexistence between these tensions and forms of peaceful cohabitation, and even mutual aid, between the different ethnic groups. However, the ambition to propose an ethnography of a neighbourhood over three generations comes up against a methodological limit: as the authors acknowledge, the book relies more on the comments of ‘pioneers’ than of ‘newcomers’, especially those most recent arrivals. In addition, it should be highlighted to the international reader that, despite the constant efforts of the authors to put the individual and collective trajectories in context with other research, the neighbourhood on which the book focuses—which is located in a place of limited attractiveness (bordering both airports in Paris’ northern suburbs)—does not of course reflect the full diversity of ‘the France of little-middles’. That said, this book is of great richness and will prove particularly informative for readers wishing to explore the social reality of France’s urban peripheries, less known than the public housing projects but now equally central in the nation’s media and political discourses.