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Minayo Nasiali, *Native to the Republic: Empire, Social Citizenship, and Everyday Life in Marseille since 1945*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016. xiii + 231 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-5017-0477-2.

Review by Nicholas Hewitt, University of Nottingham.

On August 25, 1973, the driver of Bus 72, travelling from the center of Marseille to the Plage du Prado, was stabbed to death by Salah Bougrine, a man of Algerian origin and with a history of mental illness. The assailant also attacked fellow passengers before being overpowered. Twenty-two years later, in 1995, Ibrahim Ali Abdallah, a seventeen-year old French-Comoran with a blossoming career in the hip-hop band B.Vice, was shot dead by National Front activists near the *cité* of La Savine, in the fifteenth arrondissement. Both events were followed by extensive displays of public mourning but with diametrically opposed perspectives: the bus driver was commemorated as the victim of unrestricted immigration, whilst the young hip-pop star was seen as the target of right-wing racism—embodied by the National Front and tacitly condoned by the police—and the paranoid fear of delinquent youth. In one sense, these two events, with their consequent backlash, appear to confirm the popularly held image of Marseille, the nation’s “second city,” as irredeemably fractured and at war with itself: the “Chicago of the South.” It came as some surprise, therefore, when, in 2005, with most major cities in France erupting in violence following the deaths of three young men of Tunisian and Malian origin in Paris, Marseille remained relatively peaceful, refusing to respond even to Prime Minister Sarkozy’s description of the rioters as “racaille.” This has become one of the most famous examples of dogs which do not bark in the night and was highlighted in a long article in *Le Monde* by Michel Samson, “Pourquoi Marseille n’a pas explosé,” which concluded that, in addition to a number of concrete elements such as more intensive and sensitive policing, greater use of social workers, and community development, the major factor was the fact that, irrespective of ethnic or geographical origin, the youth of Marseille took their identity from the city first, with only moderate allegiance to the nation and scant interest in its capital.[1] In other words, as many previous commentators had concluded, Marseille is not really a French city at all and operates by its own rules. In this fascinating and enlightening book, drawing upon national, departmental, and municipal archives and newspaper files, Minayo Nasiali explores the challenges faced by Marseille since the Second World War in the form of unregulated immigration, especially from North Africa, against a backdrop of industrial and commercial decline and attempts to reconcile the apparently conflictual nature of Marseille society with its no less apparent harmony in the period of the 2005 national riots. In this context, she quite rightly identifies the concept of citizenship as the key factor, tracking its evolution from the still surviving colonial Empire to the post-colonial world of the DOM-TOMs and independent francophone nations, and encapsulated in the January 2005 movement, pre-dating the autumn riots, “Nous sommes les indigènes de la République,” from which the book takes its title.

The route Nasiali chooses to take through these contradictory tensions leads her to focus almost exclusively on housing, which to a large extent serves her well: there is no better indicator of the success and failure of local and national governments’ ability to manage the pre-existing problems of urban poverty and poor hygiene, together with the unforeseen and irregular process of immigration, which

reached its crisis in 1962 with the mass exodus of *repatriés* from Algeria. Her story begins with the national housing shortage facing France (along with most Western European countries) in 1945, when it inherited a combination of urban slums no longer fit for residential purpose and extensive war damage to the housing stock of its cities. In Marseille, the Vichy Government and German Occupation forces had already famously demolished the slum districts to the North of the Vieux-Port, as a combination of public health measures and police and security concerns (the district was the city's red-light district and perceived to be the center of criminal and resistance activity), and, as Nasiali reminds us, the continued involvement of Vichy-era technocrats was an important factor in post-war French planning. In the short term, however, this "urban cleansing" merely displaced the population, and its problems, to other inner-city districts like the traditional working-class Belle-de-Mai or the Saint-Lazare *quartier* in the third arrondissement. The highly predictable response, both locally and nationally, was in the form of squatters' movements and the impromptu construction of shantytowns in inner-city courtyards. At this point, two interlinked, but separate, strands emerge: the State's and the municipality's legitimate concern for public health issues, which often morphs into more overtly social engineering projects; and the squatters' increasingly vocal assertion of the right to housing as essentially bound up with the concept of national identity and citizenship. Nasiali quotes from constituents' letters to the *maire*, Gaston Deferre, demanding adequate housing provision as their right as French and Marseille citizens. The narrative then becomes more familiar, with national and local government responding to the housing crisis by the succession of public housing projects, which still mark France's urban environment, the lynchpin of which was the HLM (*Habitation à Loyer Modéré*), the successor to the *Habitations à Bon Marché* (HBM), pioneered by Henri Sellier in the 1920s, and which grew into the vast high-rise, high-density housing estates, the *grands ensembles* or *cités*, which dominate the banlieues of all of France's major cities and surround Marseille, particularly in the North. The problem with the operation of this process in Marseille was that, from the outset, it was never evenhanded and prioritized white French housing applicants over ethnic minorities, often characterized, inaccurately, as "gypsies" or "Arabs," and suspected of inveterate delinquency: an echo, not merely of Louis Chevalier's *Classes laborieuses, classes dangereuses*, but of the invidious nineteenth-century English distinction between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. Thus, when slum-dwellers were re-housed, the white French inhabitants were routed towards the modern HLMs, with all modern conveniences, whilst the rest, considered "asocial" and not yet, literally, fully house-trained, were granted only transitional accommodation in "reduced-norm housing." Underlying this process, was the barely disguised racism implicit in the concept of a "seuil de tolérance," a hypothetical limit to the proportion of immigrants within a community beyond which it was dangerous to proceed without conflict.

This state of affairs was immeasurably exacerbated by the deteriorating relationship with Algeria, which, as Nasiali correctly assesses, was particularly acute in the case of Marseille, which was considered highly vulnerable during the Algerian War. If anything, she underestimates the ties between the two Mediterranean capitals: not only was Marseille the main port of transit for goods, passengers, and military personnel between France and Algeria, Algiers, the same distance from Marseille as Paris, exerted a similar attraction, with frequent exchanges across the Mediterranean and a long-term Algerian migrant population in the city well before the 1940s. The unforeseen influx of North African migrant workers into Marseille to plug post-war labor shortage contributed to the city's housing crisis, especially when the "Accord de Constantine," of 1959 followed by the Evian Agreements of 1962 recognized the right of Algerian workers to a social housing provision, first in the form of *foyers* for single male workers, then, for families, in more permanent accommodation. The problem, however, was that, in spite of permanent residence and French citizenship, North African immigrants, followed by their West African and Comoran counterparts, were effectively segregated, and often not solely through the official social housing policy. Different communities, such as the Harkis, fiercely defended their right to live amongst their own, a factor which, through community self-policing, may have contributed to the non-explosion of 2005. Notwithstanding, the process was now in motion to create the ring of *grands ensembles* around the city which is now synonymous with the popular image of Marseille. The book concludes by noting the positive action in assimilating potentially alienated and delinquent young people, especially under the Mitterrand Presidency, in the form of sports for young people (though, surprisingly, no mention of his Minister,

Bernard Tapie, once President of Olympique de Marseille or the quasi-religious fervor for the club by all sectors of the community) and, under Jack Lang's initiative, popular music in the form of rap and hip hop, in particular the La Sound Musical School that sponsored the band of which Ibrahim Al Abdallah was a member, B.Vice.

This is an impressive and illuminating insight into post-war Marseille social housing, focusing especially on the immigrant populations who came to occupy these estates on the city's periphery and on their hard-fought quest for citizenship as Empire gave way to the post-colonial state. The constraints of that focus, however, prevent the book from being anything like a comprehensive account of "everyday life in Marseille." Whilst the slums of the city-center quarter of Peyssonnel in the early 1950s are meticulously documented, there is no follow-up to the transition of the Avenue de Noailles or the Cours Belsunce to inner-city immigrant quarters. Nor do we see much of the non-immigrant population of the city, whether comfortably off or poor, or, for that matter, the increasing gentrification of the inner city for white-collar incomers from Paris and the North, which risks posing serious additional social problems already encountered elsewhere. As Nasiali rightly points out, currently Marseille's population, including, crucially, those who live in the *grands ensembles*, is contained within the civic boundary, so that those who live in the Quartiers Nord are in arrondissements of the city, whereas their equivalents in Paris, for example, are in the *banlieue* under the administration of other, relatively newly-created *départements*. Unless gentrification is carefully managed, the social cohesion that comes from everyone sharing the identity of "Marseillais" is likely to break down. At the same time, it would be interesting to see if the city still retains its role as a magnet for regional migration as rural dwellers leave the land for the city.

Similarly, whilst Nasiali is right to focus on the "right to a home" and "right to comfort," it could be argued that part of the social contract involves other rights, no less important, such as employment, education, or social mobility. We hear a lot about community action, protest movements and animation, but it remains difficult to get a feel for what "everyday life" is like for those who live in the *cités*. We know that the unemployment rate is very high, but how is it distributed by age or profession? Similarly, it would be useful to know the level of educational provision from *école maternelle* to *lycée* and beyond, especially in comparison with more privileged districts, as it would be to see statistics for health care, family consumer expenditure, and *allocations sociales*.

In this respect, whilst there is a highly vibrant, personal side to the narrative that begins with the author's reminiscences about her time living in the traditional immigrant quarter of Le Panier and her learning to decode the community, leading to the passionate, often despairing voices of the letter writers at their wits' end as to how to house and care for their family, it is often buried underneath what is essentially a fairly recognizable history of post-war French planning and housing policy. Nasiali mentions Claude McKay, the Jamaican author of the novel *Banjo* about black seafarers jumping ship in Marseille in the 1920s (and which, interestingly, observes the antagonism of the earlier immigrant Italian dockers towards the more recently arrived West Africans), and it is a shame that she makes no further use of other creative writers. Ousmane Sembène, whose 1956 novel *Le Docker Noir* sharply evokes the black community living in slum hotels of the Saint-Charles district, many of whom feel that their war service for liberation should have entitled them to "citizenship," would have been particularly useful in providing a more personal perspective, as would the doyen of late twentieth-century Marseille novelists Jean-Claude Izzo, whose Fabio Montale trilogy constitutes one of the best guides to Marseille in the 1990s: in *Total Khéops* (1995), the detective's girlfriend, Leila, is the daughter of an Algerian immigrant, unemployed since the collapse of the docks and the failure of the port of Fos, who lives in the *Quartiers Nord* and has studied for her *maîtrise* at the University of Aix. It would be interesting to see to just how unusual, or not, this trajectory might be in the world of the *cités*. Izzo dedicated his second novel, *Chourmo* (from "chiourme," the crew of a "galère," used by François Dubet, quoted here, to epitomize the existence of adolescents in the *grands ensembles*) to Ibrahim Ali Abdallah, one of the negative poles of Nasiali's analysis. But *Total Khéops*, in spite of its bleakness (Leila is murdered by ex-colonial soldiers supporting the National Front), still celebrates Marseille's strength in its diversity. Hassan, the owner of Montale's favorite bar, Les Maraîchers,

welcomes all his customers with the same greeting, “Salut Etrangers!”: “Ici, on était tous l’ami étranger,” another version of the concept of “indigènes de la République.”^[2] Moreover, whilst some use has been made of interviews, in terms of the voices of the inhabitants of the *cités*, it is surprising not to find any exploration of the role of local radio stations, personal memoirs or local tracts, pamphlets, and newsletters.

The author begins her study by recalling that she chose Marseille as a subject on a hunch and that, as her research progressed, she moved from the question “Why didn’t Marseille burn?” to “What can looking at the local-level and everyday life tell us about twentieth-century France?” (p. x). This book demonstrates that her hunch paid off handsomely. The only concern (apart from the use of “taudi” as a singular for “taudis,” some unnecessary English versions of place names, and the questionable assertion that apartments in HLMs were available for purchase, confusing private development and owner occupancy) might be that there is perhaps too much emphasis on the knowns of twentieth-century French planning and housing history, to the detriment of the all-too-often stifled voices of those living their everyday lives in all of Marseille’s arrondissements.

NOTES

[1] Michel Samson, “Pourquoi Marseille n’a pas explosé,” *Le Monde*, Dec. 15, 2005, pp. 20-21.

[2] Jean-Claude Izzo, *Total Khéops* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 288.

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