
Managing the Postcolony:

Minority Politics in

Montpellier, c.1960–c.2010

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Abstract

Using the case study of Montpellier, this article explores the relationship between local political actors and postcolonial minorities since the end of the Algerian War – particularly, the city’s pied-noir, harki, Moroccan and Jewish populations. It examines the discourses used to secure the electoral allegiances of these groups and the myriad ways in which they laid claim to certain civic and political spaces. It employs diverse oral, archival and audio-visual sources to demonstrate how postcolonial minorities have gained important concessions from local authorities and how identity politics has developed under the Fifth Republic, despite France’s strong republican tradition.

Ici, c’est le tunnel le plus long du monde: vous entrez en France et vous ressortez à Ouarzazate!
Georges Frêche, the mayor of Montpellier, at the opening of the first line of the Montpellier tramway in June 2000¹

For the past forty years the question of how to deal with postcolonial minorities has been a perennial feature of the French political landscape. The debate has taken many forms. In the early 1980s the newly elected Socialist government popularised the idea of the *droit à la différence* – a soft form of French multiculturalism that aimed to raise the profile and legitimacy of minority politics and regional languages. At much the same time the Front National began to gain prominence with its first electoral successes in 1983. Their campaigns were largely built on an aggressive critique of

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¹ Quoted in Xavier Ternisien, ‘Georges Frêche, un habitué des dérapages’, *Le Monde*, 28 Jan. 2010.

France's attitude towards postcolonial minorities: the (Socialist) state was deemed to be excessively lax, allowing immigrants to arrive in ever greater numbers and exploit the welfare system.² The so-called 'headscarf affair' in 1989 made sure that the issue remained at the top of the agenda. Once again, the validity of minority politics was the main concern but, by this time, the voices in favour of a tolerant *droit à la différence* approach had been drowned out. Instead, France witnessed a resurgence of republican rhetoric that reinforced the principles of French secularism (*laïcité*) and re-emphasised the traditional Jacobin hostility towards minority politics and expressions of difference within the public sphere.³

The 'headscarf affair' cast a long shadow over French politics, ultimately leading to the ban on religious symbols in schools in 2005 and the 'burka ban' in 2010. During this period there were dissenting voices – public figures who argued for a more flexible approach – but they faced stiff opposition from a wide array of intellectuals, academics and politicians who maintained that any concessions would result in the inexorable rise of *communautarisme*.⁴ Unlike the English 'communitarianism', which refers to a specific branch of multicultural theory within the political thought of Anglo-American liberalism, the term *communautarisme* has a more polemical meaning in France where it describes the dangerous fragmentation of the body politic when faced with multiple and overlapping expressions of religious, ethnic or racial politics. Over time, it has become a catch-all term for French fears about social and political disintegration, as well as a vehicle for all manner of negative stereotypes about British multiculturalism and American 'ghettos'.⁵ Its ubiquity is reflected in the fact that, in the last decade, it has been used by political parties of all stripes. Whether in discussions about the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages or the distribution of halal meat, the first word to appear in editorials and television debates is invariably *communautarisme*.

This passion has not been matched by academic work on the subject. In reality, we know relatively little about how minority politics actually works at a local level in France. There is a rich sociological and ethnographic literature on the integration of minority, primarily immigrant, populations.⁶ There is a growing interest in the

² James Shields, *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (London: Routledge, 1997).

³ For a detailed analysis of this, see Emile Chabal, *A Divided Republic: Nation, State and Citizenship in Contemporary France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2014). See also Cécile Laborde, *Critical Republicanism: The Hijab Controversy and Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Emile Chabal, 'Writing the French national narrative in the twenty-first century', *The Historical Journal*, 53, 2 (2010), 495–516; and Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

⁴ See for instance Michel Wieviorka, ed., *Une société fragmentée: Le Multiculturalisme en débat* (Paris: La Découverte, 1996).

⁵ This critique has been strongly articulated in books such as Pierre-André Taguieff, *La République enlisée: Pluralisme, communautarisme et citoyenneté* (Paris: Éditions des Syrtes, 2005). On the wider context, see Emile Chabal, 'The rise of the Anglo-Saxon: French perceptions of the Anglo-American world in the long twentieth century', *French Politics Culture and Society*, 30, 1 (2013), 39–40.

⁶ Classic texts include Abdelmalek Sayad, *La Double Absence: Des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré* (Paris: Seuil, 1999) and Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset français: Histoire de l'immigration XIXe–XXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1988). For more recent approaches, see Beth Epstein, *Collective Terms: Race, Culture,*

effects of ‘postcolonialism’ on French politics.⁷ There have even been attempts to write ‘ethnic’ histories, such as Pap Ndiaye’s work on the position of black people (*‘la condition noire’*) in France.⁸ But case studies of the relationship between minorities and political mobilisation in the Fifth Republic are few and far between. The best have focused on the integration into metropolitan France of the million or so French Algerians of European origin (*‘pieds-noirs’*) who fled Algeria at the time of independence in 1962 and whose plight features prominently in the case of Montpellier.⁹ Yet many questions remain unanswered. How have postcolonial minorities been mobilised by local political leaders? How have they sought to impose their ideas and priorities on local authorities? How have local governments managed competing minority identity claims? These are the key issues that I want to explore in this article. The aim is to give a richer portrait of how minority politics has developed and been instrumentalised in a large provincial French town in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Montpellier is a particularly good site for this kind of study. It is sufficiently small to have remained under unitary political control but diverse enough to provide opportunities for different minorities to assert themselves in the public sphere. Significantly, it has also undergone a period of sustained population growth since the 1960s, a large proportion of which has been driven by successive waves of postcolonial migrants – first the Algerian *rapatriés* in 1962, and subsequently Moroccan labour migration in the 1980s and 1990s. This built on existing migration flows from Spain and a significant expansion in the student population – one of the largest in France.¹⁰ The result is that Montpellier has earned a reputation as a dynamic and youthful melting-pot in which minority political activism of all kinds has flourished. Finally, a key reason for choosing Montpellier is the continuity in administration. The city was governed from the late 1970s until the mid 2000s by the larger-than-life political figure of Georges Frêche, whose charisma, idiosyncratic personality and well-documented talent for clientelism offer a unique insight into the inner workings of provincial French politics.¹¹

and Community in a State-planned City in France (Oxford: Berghahn, 2011) and Jennifer Selby, *Questioning French Secularism: Gender Politics and Islam in a Parisian Suburb* (London: Palgrave, 2012).

⁷ Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Françoise Vergès, *La République coloniale* (Paris: La Découverte 2003); Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, eds, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Hodder, 2003).

⁸ Pap Ndiaye, *La Condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009).

⁹ Jean-Jacques Jordi, *De l’exode à l’exil: Rapatriés et pieds-noirs en France* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1993); Yann Scioldo-Zürcher, *Devenir métropolitain: Politique d’intégration et parcours de rapatriés d’Algérie en métropole (1954–2005)* (Paris: Éditions de l’EHESS, 2010); and Emmanuelle Comtat, *Les Pieds-noirs et la politique: Quarante ans après le retour* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 2009).

¹⁰ Gérard Cholvy, *Histoire du Languedoc: De 1900 à nos jours* (Toulouse: Privat, 1980). According to statistics from the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, Insee), the proportion of students as part of the urban population in 2011 was 8.1%, second only to Poitiers. Sophie Audric and Olivier Tasqué, *Repères synthèses pour l’économie du Languedoc Roussillon*, No. 1 (Montpellier: Montpellier Agglomération, 2011), 1.

¹¹ Frêche was a *député* (member of parliament) from the Hérault from 1973 to 2002 (with breaks 1978–81 and 1993–7), mayor of Montpellier, 1977–2004, and president of the Languedoc-Roussillon region,

A detailed examination of minority politics in Montpellier therefore has the potential to reveal a good deal about how local politics is done under the Fifth Republic. The model of the local ‘notable’ – anchored in a specific region and drawing on a web of networks to hold on to power – is crucial to our understanding of the nineteenth century.¹² But we do not have a clear idea of how the politics of decentralisation under the Fifth Republic has affected the practice of local power, nor do we have an adequate account of how localities have dealt with France’s highly contested postcolonial memory, much of which has been transmitted through migrants. France’s postcolonial ‘memory wars’ have received national attention but they have mostly been fought at the local level in debates over statues, museums and urban planning as minorities have jostled to make themselves heard in an increasingly diffuse political space.¹³ Indeed, I will suggest that the *communautarisme* that has been so fiercely debated by public intellectuals is a natural part of local politics in cities like Montpellier. The skill of a politician like Frêche is that he was able to turn it to his advantage. He, as with most left-leaning French politicians of the Fifth Republic, repeatedly and boisterously proclaimed his commitment to anti-*communautariste* and republican principles, but the reality on the ground was very different. While journalists focused on his famed ‘big mouth’ and political indiscretions, he was patiently shaping Montpellier’s minority politics in his own image and providing a template of how to manage the everyday life of postcolonial France.

The costs of decolonisation

In December 1964 the French journalist Olivier Todd published a profile of Montpellier in the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Its main purpose was to provide an assessment of the left’s chances in the upcoming municipal elections but it simultaneously painted a picture of a city in transition, turned upside down by huge in-migration and a corresponding growth in economic investment. In 1945, Montpellier’s population was less than 100,000; by the 1970s, it was almost 300,000. The mayor at the time – François Delmas, who ruled uninterrupted from 1959 to 1977 – was encouraging prominent firms such as IBM to move to the city, thereby giving a boost to an already flourishing local economy. With large numbers of small businesses being renovated in the city centre and the successful development of a *zone industrielle* on the outskirts, Montpellier appeared to be the archetype of the boom town during the Trente Glorieuses of French post-war economic growth. Todd went

2004–10. He died having just won re-election as president of the region in 2010. He was also elected and re-elected as a municipal councillor in Montpellier from 1971 until his death.

¹² André-Jean Tudesq, *Les Grands Notables en France (1840–1949): Étude historique d’une psychologie sociale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1964); Christophe Charle, *Les Élités de la République (1880–1900)* (Paris: Fayard, 1987).

¹³ Pascal Blanchard and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, eds, *Les Guerres de mémoires: La France et son histoire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).

so far as to say that the sun-washed streets reminded him of the ‘joli désordre’ of Phoenix, Arizona.¹⁴

Amidst the rather a-political talk of economic growth, however, there were uncharacteristically strong emotions hidden just below the surface. When Todd asked Delmas about the secret to his longevity and popularity, the source of this emotion slipped out: ‘j’ai mis la politique générale de côté . . . Depuis juillet 1962, je ne lis plus la première et la dernière page des journaux . . . Tout ce à quoi je croyais est mort . . . l’Algérie française’. For Delmas, as for many other inhabitants of Montpellier in the 1960s, the decolonisation of Algeria was the unavoidable horizon of contemporary politics, and it had a profound impact on the city. Even for those who were not conscripted or politically involved, it was impossible to avoid the threat of terrorism. There were over thirty separate bomb attacks in the first three months of 1962 and Montpellier quickly earned a reputation in the press as the ‘most bombed city in France’.¹⁵ Many of the perpetrators were members of the secret armed organisation, Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS), a radical network of pro-Algérie française militants in Algeria and metropolitan France founded in 1961. Their numbers remained small but they actively recruited amongst the city’s large student population.¹⁶ This was not difficult given that the university, like many others in France, was sharply divided between anti-colonial activists grouped around one of the national student unions, the Union Nationale des Étudiants de France (UNEF), and supporters of Algérie française, who gravitated towards the Fédération National des Étudiants de France (FNEF).¹⁷ A clear indication of the depth of feeling was that, even as late as 1967, the FNEF remained the majority union: by this time, Montpellier was the only campus in France where this was the case.¹⁸

Existing tensions were exacerbated by the arrival in Montpellier of tens of thousands of *rapatriés* in the period 1958–62. The administrative term *rapatrié* brought together the European population of Algeria and Muslim soldiers who fought alongside the French army during the Algerian War, many of whom were forced to flee at the end of the war in 1962. But in everyday parlance the two groups were differentiated: the former were known as the *pieds-noirs* and the latter were called the *harkis*. As we will see, they did not suffer the same fate – the *harkis* were spatially and socio-economically marginalised for several decades – but both groups contributed to the reshaping of the city. In the 1960s and 1970s it was above all the growing sense of *pied-noir* political identity and activism that penetrated and

¹⁴ Olivier Todd, ‘Qui gouverne Montpellier?’, *Nouvel Observateur*, 17 Dec. 1964, 8–9.

¹⁵ Préfet de l’Hérault to Ministre de l’Intérieur, 19 Apr. 1962, Archives départementales de l’Hérault (henceforth ADH) 448 W 81. ‘L’Ultra Delmas va-t-il rester encore maire de Montpellier, la ville la plus plastiquée de France’, *L’Humanité*, 23 Feb. 1962.

¹⁶ Hélène Chaubin, ‘Le Sud, terre de prédilection de l’activisme? L’OAS-Métro dans l’Hérault’, in Raphaëlle Branche and Sylvie Thénault, eds, *La France en guerre 1954–1962: Expériences métropolitaines de la guerre d’indépendance algérienne* (Paris: Autrement, 2008).

¹⁷ Anne-Marie Schaller, ‘Montpellier, alerte à la bombe’ in *Pieds-Noirs: Une histoire française*, hors-série *Midi Libre/L’Indépendant* (May 2012), 52; Florence Ganivet, ‘Marc di Crescenzo: Trente ans de dérives’ in *L’Express*, 11 Oct. 2004.

¹⁸ Chaubin, ‘Le Sud, terre de prédilection?’, 306.

transformed the political landscape. This was true from the moment of arrival. The decision to move to Montpellier was, in the minds of many *pieds-noirs*, a political one. They appreciated the ‘Mediterranean culture’ and the attractive climate, but they also knew that Delmas was their ‘friend’.¹⁹ The mayor had repeatedly come out in favour of Algérie française, to the point of provoking a political crisis in April 1962 when eight members of the municipal council resigned in protest at his refusal to condemn OAS terrorism.²⁰ But, while his left-wing opponents were calling for his immediate resignation in the wake of the crisis, Delmas was gaining formidable political capital amongst the *pieds-noirs*. His open opposition to the decolonisation of Algeria offered hope for a population wounded by their ‘betrayal’ at the hands of the metropolitan government and its president, Charles de Gaulle.²¹ Unlike the mayor of Marseille (Gaston Defferre), whom the *pieds-noirs* believed was resolutely hostile to their presence, Delmas demonstrated his commitment by personally greeting the new *rapatriés* at a large reception centre in Montpellier and pushing hard for the construction of temporary accommodation.²²

In the medium-term, too, the mayor was true to his reputation. He had promised housing and jobs – the two most pressing concerns for the new arrivals – and a booming economy allowed him to deliver on both promises. Documents reveal the extent to which the question of housing was a veritable headache for local authorities overwhelmed by thousands of new arrivals.²³ The problem was acute in Montpellier: of the one million *rapatriés* who had migrated to France by the end of 1962, as many as 50,000–60,000 of them arrived in the Hérault, with at least 25,000 of them choosing to settle in the region’s largest city.²⁴ There were already plans for urban expansion to the west of Montpellier and these were rapidly earmarked for the new arrivals. Between 1962 and 1968 an entire network of new neighbourhoods sprang up amidst the ageing vineyards and parched *garrigue* countryside. The most emblematic was the Petit Bard, a complex of tower blocks with 860 flats. Thousands also moved into the new Lemasson, Saint-Martin, La Pergola and Mas Drevon neighbourhoods. Finally, hundreds of flats – out of a total of more than 10,000 – in the vast La Paillade

¹⁹Examples of the reasons for choosing Montpellier – including the climate – can be found in the numerous letters sent by *pieds-noirs* to the mayor of Montpellier requesting employment in 1961–2. Archives municipales de Montpellier (henceforth AMM), série W/K (11, 6, 4) [‘Demandes d’emploi rapatriés’].

²⁰‘Critiques à l’égard de la Municipalité de Montpellier’, rapport de la Direction Générale de la Sureté Nationale, 18 Apr. 1962, ADH 448 W 31.

²¹François Delmas, ‘Me Delmas, NON, NON, NON!’, *Midi Libre*, 5 Apr. 1962.

²²‘Le centre d’accueil de l’ancien lycée a accueilli déjà plus de 3.000 rapatriés’, *Midi Libre*, 14 Jul. 1962; ‘Rapatriés d’Afrique du Nord – logement’, Délibérations du Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Montpellier, 4 Dec. 1962, ADH 1128 W 8725.

²³‘Sur l’action menée et les résultats obtenus dans le Département de l’Hérault en faveur des Rapatriés’, Direction départementale, service des rapatriés, 14 Feb. 1964, ADH 734 W 32.

²⁴Joseph Schultz, ‘L’Effet rapatrié dans l’Hérault’ in M. Khellil and J. Maurin, *Les Rapatriés d’Algérie en Languedoc-Roussillon, 1962–1992* (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier III, 1992).

tower block complex inaugurated in 1967 were reserved for the *pieds-noirs*.²⁵ A large majority of these flats were classed as social housing (*habitations à loyers modérées*, HLM) and therefore available at preferential rates. By offering them to the *pieds-noirs*, Delmas made an astute political calculation. He was genuinely concerned about the *rapatriés* but he also knew that he would be guaranteed re-election with such a devoted support base.²⁶ It was a strategy that paid off handsomely. Without official statistics, it is hard to know the voting intentions of the *pieds-noirs* in the 1960s and early 1970s, but community leaders estimate that at least three-quarters of them supported Delmas, regardless of their voting preferences in national elections.²⁷ The mayor used local political figures of *pied-noir* origin like Vincent Amoros and Willy Diméglio to ensure that his political message passed directly to the community.²⁸ Still today, local community leaders are loyal to his memory: without Delmas, they argue, Montpellier would be a sleepy provincial backwater.²⁹

Socio-economic integration was facilitated by economic growth. In addition to occupying new urban spaces, *pied-noir* families took over failing small businesses and renovated shops in the city centre. New restaurants – like Chez Prosper on the main artery Boulevard Pasteur – became meeting points where members of the community could gather around a couscous and reminisce about Algeria.³⁰ In peri-urban areas to the north and east of the city, the *pieds-noirs* renovated vineyards and farms, which had been badly affected by the harsh winter of 1956. In these areas, they were often given a frosty reception: the new arrivals regarded the rural Languedoc as an undeveloped backwater, while local inhabitants resented the subsidies the *pieds-noirs* received, which amounted to 130 million francs in the Hérault alone by early 1964.³¹ In time, sustained growth and low unemployment muted these criticisms, to the point that *pieds-noirs* soon saw themselves as the driving force behind the region's economic success. This view is largely borne out by contemporary sources, as well as the few studies that exist: population growth and state support for the *pieds-noirs* flooded the region with money and a willing labour force.³² By the mid 1970s local

²⁵ 'Fiche statistique de l'opération [La Paillade] au 30 novembre 1972', Préfecture de l'Hérault, ADH 835 W 29.

²⁶ Social housing was used as a political tool in other southern cities as well; for a stimulating analysis of the situation in Marseille, see Ed Naylor, "'Un âne dans l'ascenseur": late colonial welfare services and social housing in Marseille after decolonization', *French History*, 27, 3 (2013), 422–47.

²⁷ Christian Goutorbe, 'À la recherche du vote pied-noir', *Nouvel Observateur*, 6 Jul. 2012.

²⁸ Willy Diméglio, interview with the author, Montpellier, 23 Jan. 2013; on Vincent Amoros, see Michel Marguier, 'Montpellier, terre d'urgence' in *Pieds-Noirs: Une histoire française*, hors-série *Midi Libre/L'Indépendant* (May 2012).

²⁹ Interviews with *pied-noir* community leaders, Maison des Rapatriés, Montpellier, 22 Jan. 2013.

³⁰ Chez Prosper was run by Marlène Partouche-Masquelier, who arrived in Montpellier in 1967. 'Les Succès d'un clan', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 Jul. 2012.

³¹ René Domergue, *L'Intégration des piés-noirs dans les villages du midi* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005). The subsidy figures are those provided by the préfecture in February 1964. 'Bilan de l'action en faveur des rapatriés dans le département de l'Hérault du 1er juin 1962 au 31 janvier 1964', ADH 734 W 32.

³² 'Sur l'action menée et les résultats obtenus dans le Département de l'Hérault en faveur des Rapatriés', Direction départementale, service des rapatriés, 14 Feb. 1964, ADH 734 W 32.

authorities could congratulate themselves on the remarkably smooth integration of a substantial migrant population.

But socio-economic integration did not automatically translate into political integration. On the contrary, the *pieds-noirs* felt a growing need to express their grievances through community mobilisation and the first stirrings of identity politics. Of course, *piéd-noir* associations in Montpellier and the surrounding region had existed since the 1950s. Some had strongly political agendas, especially during the final years of the war, but most were focused on providing for the immediate material needs of the community in the years following their departure from Algeria.³³ With the exception of national-level associations such as the Association Nationale des Français d’Afrique du Nord, d’Outre-Mer et de leurs Amis (ANFANOMA, founded in 1956), they tended to be little more than networks of people grouped around a single individual. In Montpellier, the best known – and most charismatic – was the doctor Jean Rosecchi. The city’s *pieds-noirs* remember him today as a vigorous community leader; some even endow him with mystical healing properties.³⁴ It seems more likely that he charmed his fellow exiles by listening sympathetically to their tales of woe and providing succour and medication (or both).

By the 1970s, however, *pieds-noirs* associations had become more politically assertive. In particular, they mobilised around the issue of compensation for damages and property abandoned in Algeria. Despite the substantial funds made available after the end of the Algerian War for their socio-economic integration, there was a widespread sense amongst the *pieds-noirs* that the French state had shirked its duty, not least because the official line was that the responsibility for compensation lay with the newly independent Algerian state. Repeated attempts on the part of *pieds-noirs* associations to raise the issue in the Assemblée Nationale yielded meagre results until the first set of laws providing for basic compensation were passed in 1970.³⁵ But this was still not enough and frustration led to the formation of new associations that were more explicit in their political aims.³⁶ They argued that, in cities like Montpellier, the *pieds-noirs* were an important electoral constituency. If they could be persuaded to back only those candidates who openly supported compensation and adhered to a *piéd-noir* narrative of the Algerian War, they had the potential to decide the fate of local politicians. The pre-eminent example of this new, more assertive style was the Rassemblement et coordination unitaires des rapatriés et spoliés (RECOURS),

³³Préfet de l’Hérault to Ministre de l’Intérieur, 14 May 1962, ADH 1039 W 4.

³⁴Interviews with community leaders, Maison des Rapatriés, Montpellier, 22 Jan. 2013.

³⁵‘Loi n° 70–632 du 15 juillet 1970 relative à une contribution nationale à l’indemnisation des Français dépossédés de biens situés dans un territoire antérieurement placé sous la souveraineté, le protectorat ou la tutelle de la France’, available at <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000019235295> (last visited 22 Jan. 2014).

³⁶Yann Scioldo-Zürcher, ‘The Cost of Decolonisation: Compensating the *Pieds-noirs*’ in Emile Chabal, ed., *France since the 1970s: History, Politics and Memory in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming 2014).

founded in 1976.³⁷ Like the ANFANOMA, it wanted to influence the debate at the national level. It nevertheless maintained a special relationship with Montpellier since this was the hometown of its emblematic leader, Jacques Roseau. It was also one of the cities in which RECOURS tested its electoral strategy – the ‘vote sanction’ – with spectacular results.

Georges Frêche and the *pieds-noirs*

The toppling of François Delmas by Georges Frêche in 1977 was a momentous political event.³⁸ But it was more than simply a temporary swing to the left after decades of centre-right rule; rather, it was indicative of a fundamental shift in the city’s demographic and cultural profile. A younger and more diverse electorate no longer saw itself in Delmas’s likeable flat-capped pragmatism. They preferred his youthful and straight-talking opponent, whose electoral slogan was ‘changer la ville, changer la vie’.³⁹ It is significant that Frêche, like a good proportion of his electorate, was not from Montpellier.⁴⁰ He was born in 1938 in the medium-sized town of Puylaurens in the Tarn, fifty kilometres (about thirty miles) east of Toulouse. In 1957 he left his home region to continue his studies in Paris and, a year later, he succeeded in gaining a place at the prestigious HEC business school. For the next eleven years, he would be a full-time student, completing his studies at HEC alongside further qualifications in history and law. In 1968, he completed two separate doctoral theses on the social and economic history of the Midi-Pyrénées region in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries and the following year he came second in the history *agrégation* exam. With a bewildering array of diplomas in hand, he was ready for an academic career. Blocked from taking up a post in his hometown of Toulouse because the doyens of the university’s right-leaning law and history faculties did not look kindly on Frêche’s left-wing past, he was forced to look elsewhere. He expressed a preference for an institution in the south and in late 1969 negotiated his first full-time post as a professor of legal history at the University of Montpellier.

³⁷ On the history of RECOURS, see Claire Eldridge, ‘“Fiers de notre passé et forts de nos liens fraternelles”: Questions of unity and solidarity between pied-noir associations’ (unpublished conference paper, presented at the Institut Historique Allemand, Paris, March 2012).

³⁸ For a sense of the reaction in the local press, see ‘La chute des citadelles’, *Sud: Hebdomadaire du Languedoc et du Roussillon*, No. 60 (21–7 Mar. 1977), 3–4.

³⁹ A facsimile of one of Frêche’s post-election victory pamphlets, in which the slogan is prominently displayed, can be found in Monique Yaari, *Architecture, Dwelling, and Display After 1968* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 103.

⁴⁰ For a more complete biography, see Emile Chabal, ‘Le Président? Georges Frêche and the Making of a Notable in Late Twentieth-Century France’ in Philip Whalen and Patrick Young, eds, *Place and Locality in Modern France* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming 2014). See also Karim Maoudj, *Georges Frêche, grandes heures et décadence* (Paris: Max Chaleil, 2007) and Frêche’s own account in Georges Frêche, *La France ligotée* (Paris: Belfond, 1990).

Frêche continued to teach at the university every year until his retirement in 2007.⁴¹ But his real focus was politics. He had briefly flirted with Maoism while a student in the late 1950s and, although he quickly abandoned the movement, the lessons of his youthful engagement remained.⁴² When he began to run for office in Montpellier in the early 1970s under the banner of the newly formed Parti Socialiste (PS), he used the style of his dissident politics to breathe life into a moribund local socialist movement. Traditionally, the Hérault and neighbouring *départements* were divided between the right-leaning cities and the left-leaning countryside. But by the 1960s, the remnants of the local SFIO (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière) had been weakened by the multiple splits within the post-war non-communist left and regular electoral setbacks. Moreover, the region's largest city – Montpellier – was dominated by the centre-right. The challenge for the young Frêche was to unite the disparate parties of the left into an electoral force that could compete with the entrenched interests of the right.⁴³ A key part of his strategy was to put in place a local coalition between the PS and the Communists that pre-empted and reflected what was happening at a national level. Most importantly, it was a strategy that brought dividends. To everyone's surprise, Frêche's united left list was narrowly defeated in the municipal elections in 1971, but the fresh-faced rabble-rouser triumphed in the 1973 legislative elections in the Montpellier-Lunel constituency that had belonged exclusively to the right for decades. Finally, in 1977, he claimed the most coveted prize of all when he was elected mayor of Montpellier. For the next three decades Frêche would fashion the city in his image and mobilise its nascent identity politics for his own ends.

Even before his victory in 1977, Frêche realised the importance of casting his net wide and appealing directly to minorities. His first campaigns were noteworthy for their political diversity: his electoral lists included Socialists and Communists, alongside another former Maoist and a former OAS activist.⁴⁴ But his greatest success was amongst the *pieds-noirs*. By turning them away from their 'saviour' Delmas, he was virtually guaranteed re-election. His achievement was even more impressive given that, at first glance, his ecumenical approach seemed to be incompatible with the single-minded political agenda of the *pieds-noirs*. Again, the hard work began before 1977. From the moment he was elected a *député* in 1973, Frêche championed the *rapatrié* cause: one of the first questions he asked in the Assemblée Nationale related to the compensation of *pied-noir* farmers from Morocco.⁴⁵ He also forged a strong relationship with Jacques Roseau, who became his ambassador in the

⁴¹ For student recollections of his teaching style, see Elodie Carcolse, 'Georges Frêche, "mauvais maire" peut-être mais bon prof', *Marianne*, 13 Dec. 2010.

⁴² Christophe Bourseiller, *Les maoïstes: La folle histoire des gardes rouges français* (Paris: Éditions Plon, 1996); citations from (Paris: Points, 2008), 67, 75, 468.

⁴³ Olivier Dedieu, 'Les notables en campagne: Luttes et pouvoirs dans la fédération socialiste de l'Hérault', *Pole Sud*, No. 2 (1995), 101–20.

⁴⁴ Some journalists have claimed that he actively courted the Front National in the early 1970s: Maoudj, *Georges Frêche*, 53–6; Fred Guilledoux, 'Georges Frêche, socialiste tendance OAS', *La Provence*, 28 Jan. 2010.

⁴⁵ *France-Horizon: Le Cri du Rapatrié*, No. 160 (Sep.–Oct. 1974), 8.

community. The key turning-point was when Delmas decided to align himself with the centre-right *Républicains indépendants* (RI) party after the successful election of their presidential candidate Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1974. Hitherto, Delmas's independence from party politics had prevented him from becoming tarnished by the lengthy and inconclusive negotiations over compensation for the *rapatriés*. This was no longer the case: as a member of the ruling party, he now shared responsibility for its failings. Over time, local *piéd-noir* associations like RECOURS became increasingly dissatisfied and urged their members to transfer their support from Delmas to Frêche at the ballot box. By 1977 even television journalists had begun to discuss how the changing allegiances of the *piéd-noirs* were threatening to tip the balance in favour of the young pretender.⁴⁶

That *piéd-noirs* were voting to the left was in itself a surprise. The few sociological studies that exist suggest that the majority of *piéd-noirs* have tended to vote for the right or the extreme-right since their arrival in France.⁴⁷ This is both because of the left's anti-colonial credentials and because many left-wing politicians have been wary of associating themselves with a community that is seen to have been complicit in the worst excesses of French imperialism. As an erstwhile Maoist who had cut his teeth during the years of anti-colonial student politics in Paris in the late 1950s, Frêche conformed perfectly to this left-wing background. And yet he put aside whatever qualms he may have had when it came to running for office in Montpellier. He knew that, without the *piéd-noirs*, he had no chance of winning. It was undoubtedly an opportunistic move, but opportunism alone cannot explain three decades of electoral success. His popularity amongst the *piéd-noirs* also relied on the way in which Frêche reshaped French socialism to suit his context. He argued that, because of their proletarian roots as Spanish, Italian, French or Maltese labour migrants to Algeria, the *piéd-noirs* actually 'belonged' to the left. 'Back in Algeria' they were on the left, so why not in metropolitan France? More generally, he played down the left's anti-colonial past. His famous catchphrase – 'ma mère c'est Jaurès, mon père c'est de Gaulle' – allowed him to claim an extremely broad definition of the nation. The vast majority of *piéd-noirs* detested de Gaulle for his 'abandonment' of Algeria, but they were nevertheless keen to be integrated fully into a postcolonial French national narrative. Frêche's generous conception of the nation made this possible.

Once he had been elected, the new mayor set about ensuring that the *piéd-noirs* would remain loyal supporters and he continued to use Roseau as his privileged interlocutor. Frêche's friendship with the president of RECOURS shielded him from the damaging effects of the 'vote sanction' when he stood for re-election in the municipal elections of 1983.⁴⁸ Elsewhere in France, RECOURS moved to punish left-wing politicians for their unwillingness to pass any compensation legislation

⁴⁶ There were a number of Frêche-Delmas debates in the national media before the municipal elections: TF1, *Journal télévisé*, 15 Mar. 1977; France Inter, *Inter-Actualités de 19h*, 16 Mar. 1977.

⁴⁷ Comtat, *Les Pieds-noirs et la politique*.

⁴⁸ Jacques Molénat, *Le Marigot des pouvoirs: Systèmes, réseaux, communautés, notables et franc-maçons en Languedoc-Roussillon* (Castelnau-le-Lez: Éditions Climats, 2004), 219–28.

during their first two years of office, but Frêche was spared.⁴⁹ Four years later in 1986, Roseau took the unprecedented step of endorsing the Gaullist RPR party in the 1986 legislative elections. His move was controversial amongst *pieds-noirs*, who accused him of ‘selling out’ to the enemy, but he gained major concessions and a new compensation law from the RPR government in 1987. Fortunately for Frêche, none of this had any impact on his local popularity: in 1989 his list was re-elected in the first round of the municipal elections and, in 1995, he emerged unscathed from the collapse of the Socialist vote in the final years of the Mitterrand presidency.

By this time, Frêche was the undisputed king of Montpellier. But he always kept the *pieds-noirs* in his sights. One of the most effective ways of doing this was to subsidise an emerging network of *pied-noir* associations and social clubs (*amicales*). Numerous scholars have emphasised the crucial role of this *pied-noir* civil society in overcoming the trauma of exile and recreating Algeria in metropolitan France.⁵⁰ Frêche went one step further and used *pied-noir* associations to further his electoral reach. He made concerted efforts to support the construction of a specifically *pied-noir* civil society from the moment he took power in 1977.⁵¹ His most significant achievement was the construction in 1980 of a community centre called the ‘Maison des Rapatriés’ – one of only six in France.⁵² A small square building at the heart of the Mas Drevon neighbourhood, it is still the focal point for community life today. It has two large rooms for meetings, parties and social events, and it is where all the major *pied-noir* associations have their offices, alongside those of the many *amicales*. Not only did this centralisation encourage better relations between disparate and often conflicting groups, it also ensured that no one could escape the patronage of the *mairie*. Even associations like the Cercle Algérieniste de Montpellier, who claim never to have accepted subsidies, were more than happy to have their offices at the Maison des Rapatriés.⁵³ During the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, *pied-noir* organisations in Montpellier were so dependent on Frêche that there has been bitter internecine squabbling since his death in 2010. Not even the dramatic assassination of Jacques Roseau by three elderly *pied-noir* extremists in 1993 could break the spell.⁵⁴ Frêche simply transferred his allegiances to Jacques Roseau’s cousin – Gilbert Roseau – and renamed a park in honour of his assassinated friend. A few years later, in 1997,

⁴⁹Jacques Roseau, ‘Histo-recours’ in *R.E.C.O.U.R.S infos*, No. 1 (Sep. 1985).

⁵⁰Andrea Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Claire Eldridge, ‘“We’ve never had a voice”: Memory construction and the children of the harkis (1962–1991)’, *French History*, 23, 1 (2009), 88–107. On the Montpellier region in particular, see Sylvie Guth, ‘Un lien social identitaire: Les Associations de pieds-noirs’ in Khellil and Maurin, *Les Rapatriés d’Algérie en Languedoc-Roussillon*.

⁵¹Within a year of his election – and after applying considerable pressure – he secured municipal and departmental funding for a *maison des rapatriés* in Montpellier. Georges Frêche to Préfet de l’Hérault, 28 Jul. 1978, and Préfet de l’Hérault to Georges Frêche, 12 Sep. 1978, ADH 1132 W 8897.

⁵²The others are located in Marseille, Cannes, Aix-en-Provence, Nice and Grenoble.

⁵³Interview with Danièle Billet, former president of the Cercle Algérieniste de Montpellier (1993–2001) and national vice-president of the Cercle (2002–3), Montpellier, 22 Jan. 2013.

⁵⁴Jacqueline Rémy, ‘Roseau: Enquête sur la mort d’un gèneur’, *L’Express*, 1 Apr. 1993; Jubineau, *L’Énigme Roseau*.

Gilbert was elected socialist *député* from Montpellier; such success would have been inconceivable without Frêche's assistance.

As the wave of *pied-noir* civil society activism in the 1980s gave way to a nationwide debate about French postcolonial memory in the 1990s, Frêche continued to adapt to the times. In 1996 he agreed to host (and partly fund) the national conference of the ANFANOMA in Montpellier at which he gave a keynote speech wholeheartedly endorsing the *pied-noir* cause.⁵⁵ At the same meeting, he mentioned his desire to build a museum in Montpellier on the history of the French presence in Algeria. In 2003, the *conseil municipal* approved the project.⁵⁶ The museum, which will be housed in the Hôtel Montcalm, was due to open in 2007 but is still awaiting full approval by the French state. When it is inaugurated, it will be the first museum in France to focus solely on the impact of French colonisation in North Africa. Given the circumstances in which it was conceived, it seems likely that the exhibitions will adhere closely to the privileged *pied-noir* narratives of benevolent colonisation and interracial harmony in Algeria.⁵⁷ If so, it will rightly be considered as Frêche's posthumous gift to the *pieds-noirs*.

It should be emphasised that mayoral engagement with *pied-noir* memory did not suddenly begin in the 1990s. In 1975, for example, Delmas had written to the then prime minister, Jacques Chirac, to protest against the government policy of encouraging municipalities to rename streets after the day on which the Évian Accords came into force (19 March 1962).⁵⁸ The *pieds-noirs* have always maintained that, by choosing to commemorate the 'end' of the Algerian War on this date, the French state has ignored atrocities committed against French citizens in subsequent months. By stating publicly that he would refuse to inaugurate a 'rue du 19 mars 1962' in Montpellier, Delmas was taking a clear stance in the 'memory wars' that opposed the *pieds-noirs* and the French state in the 1970s. But the difference in the 1990s was that Frêche was also at odds with his own party. He, too, repeatedly refused to inaugurate a 'rue du 19 mars 1962' during his time as mayor but he went further by openly supporting the highly controversial 2005 law which stipulated that schools should teach the 'positive effects of French colonisation in North Africa'. Much to the embarrassment of the PS national leadership, he interrupted a meeting of the Montpellier city council shortly after the debate on the law in parliament in November 2005 and embarked on a lengthy diatribe against 'self-hating' colonial guilt that ended with him singing patriotic colonial-era army songs.⁵⁹ It was the

⁵⁵ 'Intervention de M. Georges Frêche, maire de Montpellier', *France-Horizon: Le Cri du Rapatrié*, Nos 376–7 (Nov.–Dec. 1996), 8.

⁵⁶ Jacques Martin, 'Le musée de la présence française en Algérie à Montpellier avance alors qu'à Marseille le mémorial de la France outre-mer piétine', *France-Horizon: Le Cri du Rapatrié*, Nos 494–5 (Jan.–Feb. 2009), 8.

⁵⁷ In an interview in 2010, Frêche claimed that he wanted the museum to represent a 'complete' history, as long as it also emphasised the 'positive aspects of colonisation'. 'Pourquoi j'ose les statues de Lénine et Mao (interview dans *La Gazette de Montpellier* du 22 juillet 2010)', in Frantz-Olivier Giesbert, ed., *Je vous l'avais bien dit: 30 ans d'entretiens avec La Gazette* (Perpignan: Éditions Talaia, 2012), 295–7.

⁵⁸ *France-Horizon: Le Cri du Rapatrié*, No. 165 (Apr. 1975), 10.

⁵⁹ François-Martin Ruiz, 'Quand M. Frêche entonne un chant colonial', *Le Monde*, 1 Dec. 2005.

kind of flowery and melodramatic public intervention for which he was famous, but it was also exactly the kind of outspoken support that had allowed him to hold on to the *pied-noir* vote in Montpellier for more than two decades. Frêche instinctively understood that the public manipulation of ideology, memory and minority identities had become vital aspects of contemporary French politics.

Integrating Montpellier's Muslim communities

On 11 February 2006 Frêche was caught on camera hurling abuse at two sons of *harki* soldiers during a memorial service for Jacques Roseau in Montpellier. As part of his tirade, he called them 'des sous-hommes'. Within days, his words had created a public sensation. Anti-racism organisations condemned the former mayor for evoking the racism of the Second World War; the leaders of the PS accused him of perverting the values of the left; and, as the media storm grew, his local right-wing opponents gleefully pointed out the dangers of their sworn enemy's 'grande gueule'.⁶⁰ Finally, on 28 February, the party leader François Hollande was forced to suspend an embattled Frêche from the PS. Over the next few years, the man who had made his populist and anti-elitist language into an invaluable asset found himself repeatedly pilloried by the media. It was no longer possible for his statements in 2008 about the number of blacks in the French football team to pass unnoticed; nor could he claim in 2010 that a senior PS politician of Jewish origin – Laurent Fabius – had a 'rather un-Catholic face' ('*tronche pas très catholique*') without incurring the wrath of Jewish and anti-racist groups. Inevitably, the media frenzy distorted Frêche's words and pulled them out of context; on each occasion, his explanations were plausible and there is little evidence to suggest that he was racist or anti-Semitic.⁶¹ But what is most interesting is that, in all three cases, the controversy had to do with race, origin or religion. Could it be that Frêche's sure grasp of identity politics was beginning to falter?

In fact, these incidents merely revealed to the wider public the extent of the networks Frêche had constructed to sustain his specific brand of minority politics. Although his management of the *pied-noir* community provides the most detailed case study, the same pattern of clientelism and patronage was replicated in the case of other minorities, most notably the *harkis*. While the story of the *harkis* has often been told alongside that of the *pieds-noirs* – not least by the *pieds-noirs* themselves, who have sought to instrumentalise their fellow exiles for political purposes – their trajectories after 1962 were rather different. On arrival in France, the 80,000 or so *harkis* did not benefit from the same state support that was offered to the *pieds-noirs*. Instead, many of them were first interned in refugee camps, the vast majority of

⁶⁰The circumstances surrounding the *harki* controversy have been exhaustively analysed in Alain Rollat, *L'Assassinat raté de Georges Frêche* (Sète: Éditions Singulières, 2008) and Gérard Laudinas, *Journal d'une curée en campagne* (Paris: Éditions Au Diable Vauvert, 2010).

⁶¹He produced a lengthy written response to these accusations in Georges Frêche, *Trêve de balivernes: Pour en finir avec l'hypocrisie* (Paris: Éditions Héloïse d'Ormesson, 2010).

which were located in rural southern France.⁶² A number of these were relatively close to Montpellier, especially those of Lodève and Saint-Pons-de-Thomières. This meant that Montpellier became a natural destination for *harkis* who were looking for work after leaving the camps, especially since the city and its mayor promised to receive all *rapatriés* with open arms.⁶³

As in the case of the *pieds-noirs*, Delmas demonstrated his commitment by offering material assistance. In a clear indication of the different administrative attitudes to the two *rapatrié* populations, there were specific instructions to give priority to *piéd-noir* social housing requests. Nevertheless, by 1965 the municipality had moved forty-seven *harki* families into prefabricated buildings at the Cités de Portaly, Massaviols, Redon and Manœuvre.⁶⁴ Some were also recruited to work on city construction projects, the outstanding example of which was the Zoo de Lunaret in 1963–4. The municipality hired approximately fifty *harkis* for the construction of the zoological park, which covers eighty hectares (c.200 acres). Once it was completed, two *harki* families were offered accommodation nearby and became the zoo's caretakers. In a remarkable recreation of colonial social structures, the *piéd-noir* Marcel Gallet was subsequently appointed as manager of the zoo in 1964. He was an enthusiastic botanist, but he also spoke Arabic. He could communicate easily with 'his' *harkis* and became their 'patron'. Soon, the Zoo de Lunaret had become a microcosm of a transplanted colonial-era botanical garden, with a determined and benevolent scientist looking after his 'natives'. This comparison was all the more powerful because local *piéd-noir* associations drew parallels between the Zoo de Lunaret and the Hamma gardens in Algiers, built by the French in 1832.⁶⁵ Quite apart from the way in which such a comparison contributed to a sense of colonial nostalgia, it also allowed the *pieds-noirs* to minimise the role of the *harkis*.

When Gallet died in 1995, he received something akin to a state funeral, with numerous local dignitaries (including Frêche) present at the memorial service. But his death did little to appease an emerging memory battle over the Zoo de Lunaret. *Piéd-noir* associations scored the first victory when, in 2007, the municipality approved the creation of an Esplanade Marcel Gallet at the entrance to the zoo.⁶⁶ Visitors can now read a short biography of Gallet and see a picture of him as they walk in. Not to be

⁶²Fatima Besnaci-Lancou and Gilles Manceron, *Les Harkis dans la colonisation et ses suites* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2008); William B. Cohen, 'The Harkis: History and Memory' in Patricia Lorcin, ed., *Algeria and France, 1800–2000* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 164–80.

⁶³[Fichiers des harkis], ADH 1027 W 54.

⁶⁴Ministre des Rapatriés to Préfet de l'Hérault, 'Attribution de logements H.L.M. aux anciens harkis', 31 Jan. 1964, ADH 530 W 7. Reports on the *harki* population of the Hérault were compiled in the mid 1970s: 'Note à l'attention de Monsieur le Préfet: situation des Français-Musulmans dans l'Hérault', 31 May 1977, ADH 1034 W 45. This temporary accommodation was finally closed down in 1976–8 after a public outcry at the atrocious conditions in which the *harkis* were living: 'Être harki, à Montpellier, en 1975', *La Dépêche du Midi*, 25 Aug. 1975.

⁶⁵A leader of the Montpellier section of the Cercle Algérieniste, Gilbert Rosas, and Marcel Gallet's sister, Yolande Guimezanes-Gallet wrote an article on the zoo entitled 'De Hamma à Lunaret: L'Histoire d'un homme', available at <http://algerianistesmtp.free.fr/zoo.htm> (last visited 21 Mar. 2013).

⁶⁶'101 millions d'Euros pour équiper la ville', *Montpellier Notre Ville*, No. 309 (Jan. 2007), 14.

outdone, Montpellier's *harki* associations demanded official recognition as well and, in 2011, the city inaugurated a plaque to commemorate those who helped to build the zoo. A ceremony was held, at which the new Socialist mayor H el ene Mandroux expressed her gratitude to the 'harkis b atisseurs'.⁶⁷ Clearly, the national controversy surrounding Fr eche's comments in 2006 had given Montpellier's *harki* associations renewed legitimacy. Any attempt to marginalise them risked a further public outcry. *Harki* associations could take advantage of this unusual political context to gain recognition of their separate status, while Mandroux's public gesture was designed to mark her out from her predecessor (and mentor).

Yet for all the attempts on the part of the new mayor to break with the past, her relations with the *harkis* relied on networks that were put in place by Fr eche. His practice of identifying privileged community interlocutors like Jacques Roseau was repeated time and again in his dealings with the city's other minorities. In the case of the *harkis*, the chosen representative was Kathir Nedromi. Before joining the French army during the Algerian War, he had been a farmer. After his arrival in France in 1963, he was recruited as a construction worker on the Zoo de Lunaret site and he remained involved with the everyday running of the park in subsequent years. This may explain why, in 1974, he was put in charge of the city's first mosque, Al-Tawba, located in the Abattoirs neighbourhood of central Montpellier.⁶⁸ When Fr eche became mayor in 1977, he immediately began searching for individuals who could act as intermediaries between him and the growing Muslim community. The fact that Nedromi was a *rapatri e* and already close to the municipality made him the ideal choice. In 1986, the municipality offered Nedromi a subsidy to open a second, larger mosque not far from the first one. The one condition was that it should be affiliated to the Grande Mosqu e de Paris (GMP), the pre-eminent Islamic organisation in France, with close ties to the French state. This – and Nedromi's loyalty – ensured that the new El-Nour mosque would remain firmly within Fr eche's web of influence.

Fr eche's next gift to the Muslim community was the construction of a multi-purpose hall with a capacity of 2,500, the Salle Polyvalente Ibn-Sina, in the Petit Bard neighbourhood in 1997.⁶⁹ By the 1990s, the character of the Petit Bard had changed significantly: the overwhelming majority of *pi eds-noirs* had moved out and been replaced by newer migrants from North Africa. The ageing tower blocks had begun to deteriorate and the whole area had become a byword for petty crime.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Karim Maoudj, 'Zoo de Lunaret: L'Hommage aux harkis b atisseurs', *Midi Libre*, 25 Mar. 2011.

⁶⁸ Lydie Fournier, 'Une gestion publique de l'islam entre rupture et rh etorique', *L'Homme et la Soci et e*, 174, 4 (2009), 43.

⁶⁹ The name of the building was designed to reinforce the idea of an 'enlightened' and 'moderate' Islam. Ibn Sina (or Avicenna in its Latinised form) was a 10th-c. Muslim scholar who became famous across Europe, North Africa and Central Asia for his writings on philosophy, mathematics, science and, especially, medicine.

⁷⁰ Youssef Girard, 'De la d ecolonisation   la ghettoisation: Le Petit Bard, symbole de la s egr egation urbaine', *Saphir News*, 29 May 2005, available at http://www.saphirnews.com/De-la-decolonisation-a-la-ghettoisation-le-Petit-Bard-symbole-de-la-segregation-urbaine_a1459.html (last visited 23 Jan. 2014).

But, despite the declining socio-economic conditions, it was still an important electoral constituency. Frêche realised he needed to adapt his politics to the changing demographic, hence the decision to build a dedicated community centre for Muslims along the same lines as the Maison des Rapatriés. Predictably, Nedromi was given responsibility for the new centre, although he ensured continuity by handing over the keys of the El-Nour mosque to Mohamed Nourredine, another *harki* and a friend of his from Lodève. In this way, the municipality retained its long-standing links with Nedromi, while simultaneously making public its commitment to the Muslim community. Moreover, since the building was a *salle polyvalente* rather than a mosque, it remained under the control of the city of Montpellier. Technically, it could be ‘reclaimed’ by the municipality at any time.⁷¹

The problem with this compromise was that it could easily be construed as a violation of the principles of French *laïcité*, especially since the 1905 legislation that enshrines the separation of Church and State prohibits state funding of places of worship. On paper, the Avicenna centre was a *salle polyvalente* but in practice it was one of the largest mosques in the country at the time. The paradox was all the more striking because, from the late 1980s until his death, Frêche loudly proclaimed his enthusiasm for French *laïcité*. In his books and interviews, he repeatedly argued for the benefits of republican integration over multiculturalism, and supported a ban on headscarves in school well before the legislation was actually passed.⁷² But, as was so often the case, Frêche said different things to different audiences. Outside his fiefdom, he was the defender of the values of the Republic; at home, he was the patron of the Muslim community, selling his highly personalised brand of *communautarisme*. As he put it himself in 2002: ‘le représentant des Musulmans, il n’y en a qu’un, c’est moi! Il n’y a pas plus de communauté harkie que de communauté marocaine ou algérienne. Ici, ce n’est pas eux qui décident.’⁷³

By now, there was public criticism of Frêche’s approach to the Muslim population in the local press but the mayor was undeterred. When the time came to build the next mosque in the heavily immigrant neighbourhood of La Paillade in 2003–4, it again came in the form of a *salle polyvalente*. This time, however, Frêche did not rely on Kathir Nedromi and his network of *harkis*. Instead, he turned his attention to the fastest-growing immigrant community in the city: the Moroccans. They had been arriving in large numbers since the 1980s. Between 2001 and 2006 alone, over 22% of the city’s 11,300 foreign arrivals were Moroccans, a percentage that almost certainly underestimates the significant proportion of Franco-Moroccans who hold French passports and therefore do not figure in the statistics.⁷⁴ Most importantly, they were becoming major electoral players in Montpellier’s western and northern

⁷¹ Lydie Fournier, *Le fait musulman à Montpellier: Entre réalités sociologiques et enjeux politiques* (Paris: Dalloz-Sirey, 2008), 112–13.

⁷² On integration, see Frêche, *La France ligotée*, 222–9. On the headscarf, see Georges Frêche, *Les éléphants se trompent énormément* (Paris: Jacob Duvernet, 2003), 118 and his talkshow appearance on Antenne 2, *Sucrée Salée*, 1 Dec. 1990.

⁷³ Quoted in Xavier Ternisien, ‘L’Ecuménisme selon Georges Frêche’, *Le Monde*, 20 Apr. 2004.

⁷⁴ Audric and Tasqué, *Repères synthèses pour l’économie du Languedoc Roussillon*, 5.

constituencies. In the summer of 2000, a group of Moroccans joined the local Green Party and began intensive campaigning.⁷⁵ In the first round of municipal elections the following year, the Greens scored unprecedented results, with over 18% in the neighbourhoods around La Paillade.⁷⁶ Frêche had signed an electoral pact with the Greens and was therefore assured of victory in the second round. But he knew that he could no longer ignore a community that made up an estimated 10% of the city's electorate.⁷⁷

His solution was to co-opt the Association des Franco-Marocains around Lhoussine Tahri to run the newly opened Salle Polyvalente Averroes.⁷⁸ The latter were urged to campaign on behalf of the mayor amongst the Moroccan community. In return, the municipality gave thousands of euros in subsidies to both Nedromi and Tahri's associations. It was a highly successful strategy. Throughout the 2000s, there were regular protests by individuals and groups who were excluded from this special relationship but none were able to break it down, even when Frêche gave up his position as mayor to become president of the Languedoc-Roussillon region in 2004.⁷⁹ In part this was because Frêche remained as head of the city council, thereby ensuring that he would still be a potent local actor. But it was also because the majority of the protests were by groups of second- and third-generation French Muslims who could not draw on the Algerian or Moroccan networks of Nedromi and Tahri.

Paradoxically, the most sustained opposition to Frêche's management of Montpellier's Muslim community came not from disgruntled young Muslims but from the French courts. In 2006 a group of local councillors took the municipality to court for having signed an exclusive agreement with the Association des Franco-Marocains for use of the Salle Polyvalente Averroes as a mosque. They argued that such an agreement constituted public funding of a place of worship. In addition, the exclusive nature of the agreement violated the principles of religious neutrality and equality that were enshrined in the 1905 law. After lengthy deliberations, the administrative tribunal of Montpellier agreed with the plaintiffs and the municipality were told to annul the agreement. The tribunal's decision was subsequently upheld by the court of appeal in 2007. Eventually, the municipality took the issue to the highest administrative court in France, the Conseil d'État. In 2011, it decided to overturn the decisions of the lower courts. In its conclusions, the council argued that

⁷⁵Jacques Molénat, 'Les Marocains montent en puissance', *L'Express*, 25 Jan. 2001.

⁷⁶Fournier, 'Une gestion politique de l'islam', 44–5.

⁷⁷Statistics organised along ethnic grounds do not exist in France and collecting them is illegal. The figure of 10% is therefore a rough estimate. In a recent article, one of the most reliable local journalists estimated the Franco-Moroccan electorate at around 9,000. Jacques Molénat, 'Les Marocains jouent et gagnent', *L'Express*, 20 Feb. 2008.

⁷⁸Again, there is a clear reference to one of the leading lights of 'enlightened' Islamic thought. Ibn Rushd (Averroes in its Latinised form) was a 12th-c. Islamic philosopher and theologian whose ideas had a significant impact on medieval European thought.

⁷⁹Many of these protests were made by fundamentalist Islamist groups of young Muslim activists such as the Union Musulmans de l'Hérault. Fournier, 'Une gestion publique de l'islam', 46–8.

there were ‘doubts’ over the agreement the municipality had signed, but the balance of evidence suggested it was within the bounds of legality.⁸⁰

This remarkable decision was a clear, if posthumous, validation of Frêche. Not for the first time, he had tested the boundaries of the law and been vindicated. As he liked to remind people, he had been taken to court three times for defamation and discriminatory remarks (most famously in 2006 after the incident with the *harkis*) but on each occasion he was cleared. He dealt with the law in much the same way as he dealt with political opposition – by ignoring it and hoping it would go away. The fact that he left such a powerful and apparently unimpeachable legacy suggests that his instinct was correct. Montpellier has remained a bastion of the Socialist Party and is still run by a team of local councillors who owe their public existence to Frêche. Inevitably, there will be change: the strength of *pied-noir* activism has reduced and the *pied-noir* vote has fragmented.⁸¹ It also seems likely that Nedromi’s network of elderly *harkis* will soon be definitively supplanted by younger networks of Algerians and Moroccans. But the basic pattern of minority politics is unlikely to change: if it worked for Frêche, there is no reason it will not work for others.

More generally, the Conseil d’État’s decision revealed the myriad ways in which local experiences have influenced national policy-making. One consequence of the lengthy and polemical headscarf debate is that *laïcité* has often been caricatured, especially outside France, as a repressive and fixed ideology imposed on individuals and local authorities by the omnipresent French state.⁸² Yet, when given the option to annul a *fait accompli* or adapt the principles of *laïcité* to the specific case of the Salle Polyvalente Averroes, the Conseil d’État chose the latter. They were careful to clarify the rules governing any agreement between a municipality and a faith-based association (*association culturelle*), but they stopped short of demanding that the city of Montpellier terminate its practice of renting out halls for use as mosques. This kind of adaptation was not an unusual exception: the Conseil d’État heard four other cases at the same time and decided, in all of them, to reject literalist readings of the 1905 law in favour of a more flexible approach. The Conseil’s overall concluding remarks emphasised this pragmatism: ‘l’équilibre auquel nous vous proposons de souscrire sera donc celui de la fidélité aux principes fondateurs de la loi de 1905, *mais dans la prise en compte de ses nécessaires tempéraments*’.⁸³ Had Frêche been around to hear the judgement, he would no doubt have congratulated himself. He always dreamed of having an impact on national policy-making but his poor relationship with Mitterrand

⁸⁰Edouard Geffray, ‘Conclusions du Conseil d’État, affaires nos. 308544, 308817, 309161, 313518 et 320796’, 19 Jul. 2011.

⁸¹In my interview with Willy Diméglio, he restated his claim that the *pied-noir* vote ‘does not exist’. For contrasting analyses, see Comtat, *Les Pieds-noirs et la politique* and Alain Leauthier, ‘L’Inexorable reflux de la cause rapatriée’, *Libération*, 9 Dec. 1996.

⁸²For instance in Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (London, 2007); Talal Asad, ‘Trying to Understand French Secularism’ in Hent de Vries, ed., *Political Theologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

⁸³‘Conclusions du Conseil d’État, affaires nos. 308544, 308817, 309161, 313518 et 320796’, 29 (emphasis added).

meant that he was never offered a ministerial portfolio.⁸⁴ Instead, it was his unique political style that influenced others. The much-maligned ‘système Frêche’ showed that it was possible for *communautarisme* to exist – and be legally-validated – at the heart of the French Republic.

Montpellier: colony or postcolony?

For all his successes, there was one accusation that Frêche found difficult to shake off. His critics routinely claimed that his management of Montpellier’s postcolonial minorities was ‘neo-colonial’. They argued that his co-optation of specific community leaders and his paternalist attitude towards Islam closely resembled France’s colonial practices in North and West Africa. This was exacerbated by his susceptibility to a *pied-noir* narrative of benevolent colonialism and his noisy adherence to the principles of republican integration.⁸⁵ It is a compelling argument: one could easily claim that Frêche went from a rabble-rousing Maoist to a boisterous colonial administrator looking after his favoured ‘indigènes’ and marginalising all those who held opposing views. The problem with this view is that it ignores the very different political structures of the French empire and the postcolonial metropole. Frêche was not dealing with a population of ‘subjects’ but an amorphous and fickle electorate.⁸⁶ If he stopped winning elections, he was doomed to disappear. His calculation was that, as an outsider, he needed to build networks of support in order to sustain his politics. This was not a ‘neo-colonial’ strategy so much as an acknowledgement of the importance of minority politics in an ever-more decentralised France.

This becomes clear if we look beyond postcolonial minorities. For instance, Frêche developed strong links with Montpellier’s influential Jewish community.⁸⁷ He became close friends with the charismatic community leader Joseph Bensoussan in the late 1970s and gave substantial material support to specifically Jewish projects. The municipality subsidised the creation of a dedicated Jewish local radio station (Radio Aviva) in 1982, financed a Jewish cultural centre (the Institut Maïmonide) in 2000, and contributed significant funds to the construction of a strictly kosher

⁸⁴This was partly because of Frêche’s notorious ‘big mouth’ but also because the mayor of Montpellier supported Rocard at the Metz congress of the PS in 1979. Mitterrand never forgave him for this show of disloyalty. For Frêche’s own take on 1979, see Frêche, *La France ligotée*, 53–6.

⁸⁵Vincent Geisser, ‘Le Révisionnisme municipal: Montpellier sous le mandat Frêche (1977–2004)’ in Sébastien Jahan and Alain Ruscio, eds, *Histoire de la colonisation: Réhabilitations, Falsifications et Instrumentalisation* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2007); Vincent Geisser and Aziz Zemouri, *Marianne et Allah: Les politiques français face à la ‘question musulmane’* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007) and Fournier, ‘Une gestion politique de l’islam’.

⁸⁶For an analysis of *laïcité* in its colonial context, see James McDougall, ‘The Secular State’s Islamic Empire: Muslim Spaces and Subjects of Jurisdiction in Paris and Algiers, 1905–1957’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 52, 3 (2010), 553–80.

⁸⁷Carol Iancu, ed., *Les Juifs à Montpellier et dans le Languedoc à travers l’histoire, du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Montpellier: Centre de recherches et d’études juives et hébraïques, 1988).

retirement home in 2009.⁸⁸ As in the case of the *pieds-noirs*, Frêche also marked himself out from the rest of his political party by repeatedly declaring his public support for the state of Israel.⁸⁹ When the controversy over Fabius's 'tronche pas très catholique' exploded and the national press branded Frêche an incorrigible anti-Semite, the city's Jewish community leaders were amongst the first to jump to his defence.⁹⁰ Likewise, the leaders of Montpellier's gay community refused to accept the increasingly negative outside interpretations of Frêche in the late 2000s. At the time of his death in 2010, they reminded journalists that he had been instrumental in supporting the gay and lesbian cause in the late 1970s. In the 1990s, he helped create the Aides and Envie associations and supported the inauguration of the Centre Gay et Lesbien de Montpellier in 1994.⁹¹ By this time, Montpellier had become known as one of France's most gay-friendly cities and it was appropriate that the country's first ever gay marriage should have been held there in May 2013.⁹² Once again, Frêche's posthumous legacy had significant political repercussions.

On closer examination, then, the argument that Frêche's minority politics was 'neo-colonial' provides only a very partial explanation of how he governed Montpellier from the late 1970s until the early 2000s. It would be more accurate to characterise his style as one of overlapping identity-based networks. Unlike Delmas, whose courting of minorities did not go much beyond his intimate relationship with the *rapatriés*, Frêche had an instinctive feel for identity politics. This is almost certainly because he entered professional politics at a time in the 1970s when it was flourishing amidst a vast expansion of civil society activism. The French decentralisation laws of the early 1980s and mid 2000s reinforced this tendency by giving greater political and economic power to local actors.⁹³ The result was a much more fragmented civil society and political space, in which traditional party allegiances broke down.

In these rapidly changing circumstances, a local potentate like Frêche could not rely solely on acquired political capital; he continuously had to renew and reassess the networks that supported him. This was especially true of a city like Montpellier where the far-right had the potential to take full advantage of any power vacuum: it was with good reason that Frêche repeatedly emphasised how he had 'protected' the city from the Front National. In many other neighbouring towns and cities, especially those with large *pied-noir* populations, the FN has regularly scored 20–30% in the past

⁸⁸ Guy Trubuil, 'Nouveau: La première maison de retraite casher est lancée', *Midi Libre*, 1 Jul. 2009; Jacques Molénat, 'Juifs: L'Élan d'un octagénaire', *L'Express*, 25 Jan. 2001.

⁸⁹ For a sense of his attitudes towards the state of Israel, see Michel Attali and Laurent Dahan, 'Qu'est Tsion pour un champion: Georges Frêche', *AM: Le Magazine du Judaïsme et de la culture juive de Montpellier et sa région*, No. 2 (Dec. 1995), 11.

⁹⁰ Guy Trubuil, 'Frêche et les juifs: Ce soupçon qui ne tient pas', *Midi Libre*, 30 Jan. 2010.

⁹¹ Stéphane Corbin, 'Mort de Georges Frêche: Hommages et distances chez les homos' in *Tétu.com*, 26 Oct. 2010, <http://tetu.yagg.com/2010/10/26/mort-de-georges-freche-hommages-et-distances-chez-les-homos/> (last visited 30 Jan. 2014).

⁹² 'Le premier mariage homosexuel a été célébré en France', *Le Monde*, 29 May 2013.

⁹³ Especially the Defferre laws (lois Defferre) of 1982 and the laws on decentralisation passed by Jean-Pierre Raffarin between 2002–4. For a wider perspective, see Michael Keating, 'Thirty Years of Territorial Politics', *Western European Politics*, 31, 1–2 (2008), 60–81.

three decades. In Montpellier, it has rarely exceeded 15%. Frêche's instrumentalisation of identity politics was one of the key ways in which he held off the threat of the far-right. For all its corruption, the 'système Frêche' was more of a postcolonial survival strategy than an oppressive neo-colonial political arrangement. It was also forward-looking: with France becoming more diverse and more stratified, there will be many other local leaders trying to run their cities and regions in the way Frêche did. The question now is how long it will take for a French political culture that has long been hostile to expressions of difference to adapt to the realities of contemporary identity politics. With such staunch opposition to any kind of *communautarisme*, there is unlikely to be any dramatic shift. But Frêche showed that it is possible to marry high republican principles and grubby clientelism in the name of civic pride – and still triumph at the ballot box.

**Gestion du postcolonialisme:
Politique des minorités à Montpellier
d'environ 1960 à 2010**

Cet article explore les rapports entre acteurs de la politique locale et minorités postcoloniales depuis la fin de la guerre d'Algérie, et plus particulièrement les pieds-noirs, les harkis, les Marocains et les juifs de la ville de Montpellier. Y est analysé le discours retenu pour recevoir l'allégeance politique de ces groupes et les multiples façons dont ils ont occupé l'espace civique et politique. Sur la base de différentes sources orales, écrites et audiovisuelles, il démontre comment les minorités postcoloniales ont su obtenir d'importantes concessions de la part des autorités locales et comment s'est développée la politique identitaire sous la cinquième République, en dépit d'une forte tradition républicaine en France.

**Minderheitenpolitik im
postkolonialen Zeitalter: Der Fall
Montpellier, ca. 1960–2010**

Dieser Beitrag beleuchtet anhand der Fallstudie Montpellier die Beziehungen zwischen politischen Akteuren und postkolonialen Minderheiten auf lokaler Ebene im Anschluss an den Algerienkrieg. Dabei konzentriert er sich insbesondere auf die Pieds-Noirs, die Harkis, die Marrokaner und auf die jüdische Bevölkerungsgruppe in der Stadt. Der Autor analysiert die Themen und Aussagen, die zur Sicherung der Wählerstimmen dieser Gruppen eingesetzt wurden, sowie die vielfältigen Arten, in der diese bestimmte bürgerliche und politische Räume für sich beanspruchten. Anhand unterschiedlicher mündlicher, archivalischer und audiovisueller Quellen zeigt der Beitrag, wie postkoloniale Minderheiten den Kommunalbehörden erhebliche Zugeständnisse abringen und wie sich trotz der starken republikanischen Tradition in Frankreich während der Fünften Republik eine Identitätspolitik entwickelte.