

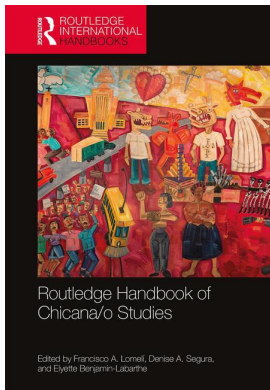
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Chicana/o Studies in France

Emergence and development

Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe

Introduction

This chapter offers some reflections on the emergence and development of Chicana/o Studies in France from as early as 1965 until 2015. The significance of an academic adventure for a group of 20 scholars, over a span of 50 years, cannot be fully appreciated/understood unless it is contextualized within a favorable national environment. The context boosted the academic activism of leaders who gathered around them dynamic individuals not only equipped with the necessary intellectual tools and multilingual abilities, but also heirs to a pervasively open mentality. Such a background permitted them to tackle a foreign theme with the acumen of distant observers, even though, quite paradoxically, they may well have considered themselves as proxy members of the Chicana/o community.

The main dynamics in their enquiries into the field consisted in tracing and exploiting fruitful analogies between the ideology of the Chicana/o movement and that of other subversive movements expressed through works written by French thinkers recently included in the academic canon. A few particularly salient paradigms were provided by French intellectuals born in decolonized Mid-Atlantic islands or Africa, such as Martinique-born Third World theoretician Franz Fanon (*Peau Noire, Masques blancs* 1952, Editions du Seuil, Paris), Martinique poet Aimé Césaire (*Discours sur le colonialisme* 1955, Présence africaine, Paris), and *Négritude* theoretician of African descent Léopold Sédar Senghor (*Négritude et humanisme* 1964, Le Seuil, Paris). The strong feelings of alienation and rage infusing Chicana/o poetry and the visual arts did echo the writings of Aimé Césaire. Conversely, his indictment of French colonizers was a useful tool in the appreciation of Alurista's violent indictment of America and the political separatism of *el movimiento*. This community of thought emerges in retrospect as an important incentive with the French Chicana/o scholars of the first and second generation.

We shall attempt to approach this historic moment in France when researchers worked in close collaboration with the Chicana/o intelligentsia, not omitting, as a liminary precaution, to pay our respects to the Chicana/o members of the community, artists, writers, critics and scholars. We can thank Jorge Huerta, María Herrera-Sobek, Donaldo Urioste, Gary Keller, Alurista, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Barbara Brinson-Piñeda, Pat Mora, Gustavo Segade, Francisco Lomelí, Rudolfo Anaya, Alurista, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Willie Herrón, Gronk, Jesús Treviño,

Víctor Fuentes, to mention only a few names among the multiple sources of inspiration and mentors. Our deepest thoughts go to Luis Leal, Abelardo Delgado, Sergio Elizondo, Ricardo Sánchez, José Montoya, Cecilio García-Camarillo, Gloria Anzaldúa, Guillermo Hernández, and so many unnamed members of the *Casas de la Raza* so similar, in many ways, to the French *Maisons de la Culture* of the 1970s.

The emergence of a French community of scholars

The transcultural voyage of young French scholars sent to the United States on exchange programs and scholarships to do field work during and after *el movimiento* (1965–1980) generated feelings of solidarity. Accustomed to their own affective, communicative culture, they found themselves outside the realm of the majority culture, steeped in a similar high-context culture as that of their French milieu, greeted with *corazón* (heart) in the Mexican barrios. A favorable psychological condition had made research more palatable and increased work potential: scholars from France, from Toulouse, Bordeaux or Paris felt instantly at home in California, New Mexico or Texas megalopolis. We were greeted as empathetic, budding sociologists within an open community, when artists were willing to waive copyrights, accepted interviews with no reluctance, opened up their archives and workshops, answered telephone calls and enquiries, often welcoming young researchers into the heart of their homes.

The French contribution to Chicana/o Studies has been facilitated by the directorship of professors turned fundraisers in newly established Americanist centers, mainly in Bordeaux, with the important quantitative and qualitative research material gathered at the CLAN research center (Cultures et Littératures de l'Amérique du Nord) turned into CLIMAS (Cultures et littératures des mondes anglophones <http://climas.u-bordeaux3.fr/>). Founded by Jean Béranger in 1974 – a visionary team leader who foresaw the advent of a tumultuous multicultural and multilingual society – it promoted the study of ethnicity with corollary *foi* including the interrelated themes of integration, acculturation, assimilation, or conversely internal exile, des-identification, the trauma of transculture, mythic or substitutive identities, activism, rebellion, cultural nationalism and separatism. He proved to be the first head of a French research center, as early as 1969, who saw the potential of Chicana/o Studies for trilingual French scholars, when he encouraged the first recipient of the Bordeaux Montaigne University student scholarship included in the Students Abroad Program, researcher Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe, to go to California on a “mission” (French term for visiting scholar) to the University of California at San Diego.

As a native of the Spanish borderlands, she would soon look with empathy into the subjects of research in San Diego, where she would listen with equal fascination to Herbert Marcuse, her philosophy professor at the PhD level, Chicana/o union leader César Chávez, a close friend of her Chicana roommates, not to omit musician Carlos Santana giving his first performance on campus with his band. Research *in situ*, in 1969, relied on the experiential and exchange, the circulation and participation within the life of the city. It proved to be a collective endeavor, whereby every investigator was free to work either on social trends, literature or history, but it also respected a federative approach that democratically oriented choices. Funds were distributed so that state-of-the arts research could be carried out in the United States, first in San Diego then later mainly in Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, thanks in great part to a close institutional trans-Atlantic partnership between the universities (established by the University of California Education Abroad Program after 1968). This is only to mention a few *loci* of predilection chosen at the collective level but also oriented by dynamic researchers-travelers who did not hesitate to spend one or two months every year meeting artists, novelists, politicians, journalists, priests, academics, librarians or just *gente* (people), in the streets looking at murals, or listening to poetry

readings in public community centers like *Casas de la Raza* in order to get as close as possible to the social reality of authentic Chicanismo.

The researchers were contributing to each other's work, editing the proceedings of symposia together after successive collaborative endeavors encouraged by the academic/governmental establishment. Investigators from Paris, Marseille and Toulouse, at a time when the Internet was not operative in the universities, met regularly to exchange ideas from their recent forays. This closely knit network also had ramifications in Spain and Germany, Great Britain, and even in Romania where the mastery of the French and Spanish languages generated an enlightened public for an assertive ethnic culture. Approaching history with a postcolonial bias and with poetry and literature as yet non-canonic proved to be the port of entry into the field, with each researcher choosing their favorite theoretician as a key to a better elucidation or analysis. It was never to impose a grid that might have smothered individual critical talent or obfuscated artistic craftsmanship. The multifaceted approach proved fruitful when French theoreticians and ideologues were summoned, confirming their utility without implying the servile use of any prior diktat.

Bilingualism as a social trend and as an educational issue, and interlingualism as a subtle poetic craft and ideological tool, remained for 30 years a common field of inquiry with a strong emphasis on border problematics, on machismo, and later on feminist and lesbian poetry, in association with French feminist research. In dealing with the geographical, linguistic, political or psychological borders, the investigations became conducive towards theorizing about the declinations of identity linked with the border paradigm and the transcultural voyage. Chicana/o artistic achievements were scrutinized, for example, when the troupe par excellence of Chicana/o theater, El Teatro Campesino, came to Bordeaux in 1985 at the invitation of Yves-Charles Grandjeat, creating a cultural event of importance within the Cuban-influenced Hispanic community of the region. Researchers from Hispanic departments would soon take up the field or, like Paris Spanish Studies professor Annick Tréguer, started exploring the United States with a camera in hand to publish original photographs of Chicana/o murals (2000). Others interviewed artists such as Willie Herrón, José Montoya or Gronk, and subsequently became donating members of the slides library at the artistic SPARC (Social & Public Art Research Center of Los Angeles (<http://sparcinla.org/>) later to create a voluminous Bordeaux archive. Invitations flourished; among others, Rudolfo Anaya, who soon introduced the Bordeaux center to a personal blend of magic realism infused with distant memories of the 17th-century Hispanic Southwest. Novelist Alejandro Morales, dramatist Carlos Morton, poet Tino Villanueva and critic Francisco A. Lomelí came and taught in Bordeaux. Cinema ensued with a comprehensive research program, including the invitation of directors such as Isaac Arstenstein and later critics, scholars and university professors Kathleen Mac Hugh and Chon Noriega from the University of California at Los Angeles, followed by the publication of an original opus on border cinema by the Bordeaux University Presses (MSHA-Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine) that would aggregate French, Spanish, Mexican and American research efforts. The French venture into Chicana/o Studies, so rich in forays, collaborations, publications, fellowships and invitations would unfortunately wind down, when seasoned researchers in 2012 found no apparent heirs, finances became short, and the field of Chicana/o Studies was, at the local and national level, left in fallow.

Cultural facilitator of French Chicana/o Studies: the era of the French Trente Glorieuses (1946–1975)

The cultural context in France during the prosperous post-war era known as “the Trente Glorieuses” (1946–1975), the celebrated 30 years following the Second World War, is praised today

for its booming universities and promotion of the arts as well. A favorable atmosphere developed in terms of the dynamic funding of research, bold incentives into groundbreaking fields, phenomena all related to the end of the colonial era of European domination and the subsequent advent of ethnic pride with newly emancipated groups. The children of first-generation immigrants or migrant workers from Spain and Portugal, combined with the forced reintegration of former French nationals of newly independent Algeria, created a nascent melting pot already perceptible in the universities.

Political events, politicians' commitments and the concomitant engage writings of prominent intellectuals – be they right wing, such as philosophers Albert Camus or Raymond Aron, or on the left of the political spectrum such as philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre – were to have a lasting impact on French academic life as a whole by providing forceful answers to the questionings of the post-war period. A few charismatic politicians left a similar imprint, such as André Malraux. Newly appointed in 1959 as “Secretary of Culture” in the de Gaulle government, he aspired to slowly transform national mentalities by enlightening students' approach to society, literature and the arts: he instituted the teaching of three languages for secondary education, therefore enriching the curricula; and opened the dual access to English and Spanish, the two languages promoted in the provinces as well as in the capital. The financial burden concretized the national ambition by bringing access for a first post-war generation of children and later to a higher education of excellence in order to come to grips with ethno-political issues. Directly considered as canonic authors in the universities, the enlightening thinkers who animated contemporary intellectual life were from then on taught at the secondary school level to become part of the academic background of the students who, in the 1960s, integrated a free university system equipped with grants and Special Opportunities programs reserved for a multiethnic meritocracy.

The decolonization that was in vogue all over the world, particularly in formerly French-dominated countries, was putting into question the legitimacy of all the dominant cultural groups, pitting vocal minority groups against a destabilized majority. Such was the case of the emancipation from French rule of present-day Vietnam (First Indochina War of 1954), Algeria (1954–1962), and the Basque minority in Southern France, who voiced accusations of internal colonization. The spirit of emancipation and consequently a yearning for freedom of thought circulated in the universities, opening up to foreign influences, triggering with young people the desire to pore into the cultural and political life of the country of the American dream – a distant but fascinating magnet at that time and the only pole of attraction – as the decline of communist USSR made all eyes turn West to the generous savior of Europe.

American Studies developed thanks to the government's voluntarism and the creation of professorships unthought of 10 years earlier. In 1967, the first professorship in American Studies was created at the Sorbonne. With financial aid from the United States, in relative rivalry with sacrosanct Anglo-Saxon Studies, research groups emerged throughout France, sponsored by the Ministry of Research, and an active Fulbright fund doled out scholarships to French students. This created a semblance of a Marshall Plan of research that the first individual Chicana/o scholars would soon benefit from as they were granted substantive funds at a national and local level.

A first generation of Americanists would concentrate on classic French issues, the themes of immigration and its corollaries: national identity, ethnocentrism, and the potential claim for a separate identity. Immigration trends in the United States were taught at Bordeaux University, while antecedents on the territory were also covered by specialists of Southern literature and history, which included the preeminence of Anglo Americans being questioned in North American and Spanish departments. A classic theme was the Spanish and Mexican past of the United States, with an emphasis on the absence of a national language in the only country in

the world where the vast majority would still pretend, in 1965, that the whole country was of Anglo-Saxon descent. Students in Toulouse and Bordeaux, more particularly in Southern France but also in Paris, were discovering the early existence of an interlingual poetry, a phenomenon of internal colonization denounced by a visible minority, and secessionist movements resembling the local Basque claims to independence that soon triggered a wave of terrorism in both Spain and France.

Two generations of Chicana/o scholars

The first generation of Chicana/o scholars, mainly Marcienne Rocard (Toulouse), Geneviève Fabre (Paris) and Jean Cazemajou (Bordeaux) were teaching, directing research, editing books, organizing events, inviting artists, poets, novelists, critics and professors from American universities. They also prepared for their successors by directing the research that would lead their former students and heirs towards a professorship with great dynamism, similar to the school gathered around Professor Luis Leal in Santa Barbara, that French academics in Bordeaux were trying to emulate. The first generation would therefore soon be followed by the second generation of the Eighties trained by the former one, but more interested in the impact of minority literature, individual artists and the arts rather than history. The second generation proved to be extremely active and productive. We shall mention here, among others, Yves-Charles Grandjeat and Christian Lerat (1995), Suzy Durruty, Ginette Castro, Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe (all from Bordeaux 3 University), Serge Ricard (Marseilles and then Sorbonne Paris 3 University), Ada Savin (1998), Catherine Lejeune, Annick Tréguer (2000), and Jean-Robert Rougé (1991), all proficient in Spanish and mainly trained in Ethnic Studies departments, whose publications are easily accessible. The quantitative aspect, amounting to around 500 articles and 15 authored or edited books, can be accessed through the Internet. The 18 theses directed within this period also attest to the dynamism of the directors. Although the second generation of researchers cannot be said to have generated followers the way the first generation did, it has contributed, thanks to writings and organization of events, to the dissemination of Chicana/o claims, in France and abroad.

One notices today the emergence of a third generation of scholars more versed in sociology, such as Emmanuelle Le Texier (2006), a former lecturer turned cultural ambassador at the European Commission, political scientist Isabelle Vagnoux at Aix-Marseilles University (2000, 2003, 2010), political science professor James Cohen at Sorbonne Paris 3 (Cohen & Tréguer 2004, 2005, Cohen & Spensky 2009), and Jeffrey Swartwood at Polytechnique Paris (2015). The current trend bears a strong characteristic by a slow disappearance of the word “Chicana/o” in favor of “Latina/o”, the stress being put on the Latina/oization of the United States. This seems to mark the inclusion of the former rebels in a Spanish-speaking community viewed as progressively conducive to a smooth integration or acculturation. We shall only deal here with the contemporaries or predecessors of the present contributor.

The pioneers: Marcienne Rocard, Jean Cazemajou and Geneviève Fabre

We will now examine the intellectual context favorable to the emergence and influence of the three pioneers, specifically the conditions leading up to Marcienne Rocard’s seminal work (1980, 1994), which cannot be separated from the academic milieu prevalent over the period. As previously mentioned, intellectual life in France in the 1960s was strongly influenced by the “Algerian war of Independence”. The territory of the formerly French colonial possession

had been arbitrarily divided into colonial departments (a term copied on French administrative divisions) since 1848, ironically enough the same date as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This coincides with Mexico's territory being drastically depleted by 51% of its land being ceded to the United States, turning the 100,000 Mexican citizens into U.S. nationals overnight. A sudden change of nationality also affected the former citizens of French Algeria who were deprived of the French nationality at the end of the Algerian war. The former colonizers' lands were nationalized by the Algerian government and the former settlers financially compensated for, after many years of legal struggle with the authorities and the courts. It is no wonder then that French university students born in former French Algeria or living in the Southwest should have become deeply interested in the fate of Mexican Americans dispossessed after the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848.

The first French scholar who engaged in a PhD course around 1965, Marcienne Rocard, who later became a professor at Toulouse Le Mirail University, in a region strongly attached to its Spanish and Arab roots, wrote her dissertation with an interest in the original 17th-century Hispanic population of the American Southwest, including the Indigenous and Mexican past of the United States. The national context emphasized the role of celebrated anthropologist and then French politician Jacques Soustelle, a politician well known at a national level for having been a close collaborator of President Charles de Gaulle. He had written extensively about the cultural legacy of the Aztecs, had become so renowned internationally that he saw his works appreciated enough to appear on the cover of *Time Magazine* in 1959.

No wonder, then, that Chicana/o poet Alurista, when questioned about the influences he considered instrumental to his neo-indigenist inspiration, did not hesitate to confess, as far back as 1980 during a symposium in Paris, that it had been the French anthropologist's exhuming of the Aztec past that triggered his inspiration when he was a student at the University of California at San Diego. He had allegedly found the 17 August 1959 copy of *Time Magazine* at the library with a portrait of Jacques Soustelle along with the caption "France: the visionary" on its cover. The same prior influence characterizes Marcienne Rocard's inspiration, whose PhD dissertation, defended in 1978 under the title *Sons of the Children of the Sun: Representation of the Mexican-American Minority in the Literature of the United States* is prefaced by a long laudatory introduction by the anthropologist, which underlines the importance of the Chicana/o minority in the United States and its potential separatist clout. The dissertation was thereafter published in book form by Paris publishing house Maisonneuve & Larose in 1980 and later translated into English and Spanish, testifying to a wide potential reading public in France, the United States and Spain. A second influence at that time was the widespread interest in Ethnic Studies in the wake of their omnipresent influence on North American curricula on the other side of the Atlantic, an immense stimulus for the nascent French North American Studies departments, after the change in mentalities as a result of the 1968 countercultural student movement.

A third factor may have accounted for an increased interest in the Mexican past of the United States: the concomitant advent and development of Spanish departments in French universities, specifically in the Southwest, a phenomenon partially due to the inflow of a cultured population of immigrants coming from Spain from 1939 onwards as political refugees, after the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. Their children gained access to French universities according to the principle of meritocracy that was a core ideological principle of the French Ministry of Education at the time. Students who were fluent in Spanish, bilingual and bicultural, whose parents were of Spanish origin, and who prided in their Spanish cultural roots, proved more apt to study themes related to Hispanic culture than other monolingual students of French descent.

Marcienne Rocard mastered three languages. Her thesis, 493 pages long, encompasses all the aspects related to Chicana/o claims to a canonic place within North American literature, music

and the arts. With a seminal introduction by Jacques Soustelle, the thesis remains today as one of the first examples of the interweaving of languages quite unusual in canonic circles where the purity of the French language was thought to be endangered. With a sociological and political bias, the book explains the cultural meaning of Chicana/o terms such as *pachuquismo*, *don*, *coyote*, *pollo*, *vato loco*, *zoot suiters*, to give only a few examples. In terms of literary history, the thesis encompasses the different canonic texts written in English in the Southwest by as many as 100 critics and authors of Anglo-Saxon origin, such as Gertrude Atherton, Joseph E. Badger, Willa Cather, Charles F. Lummis, John Steinbeck, Helen Hunt Jackson, William Saroyan and Ernest Hemingway. As far as Mexican-descent authors writing in Spanish during the same period, 60 classic works are studied, among them *The Plum Plum Pickers* (1969) by Raymond Barrio, *City of Night* (1963) and *Numbers* (1967) by John Rechy, *Chicano* (1970) by Richard Vásquez, *Pocho* (1959) by José Antonio Villarreal or “. . . Y no se lo tragó la tierra”/“. . . And the Earth Did Not Part” (1971) by Tomás Rivera. Issues of assimilation, integration, acculturation, language, and the gradual or sudden development of a sociopolitical claim towards a separate identity among members of the minority, that emerge through literature and poetry around the year 1970, are fully covered in the dissertation. The rediscovery of an ancient Mexican past, redolent of neo-Indigeneity, harks back to an idealized Aztec civilization centered around the myth of Aztlán, a notion that justifies the very title of the thesis “The Sons of the Sun”, that the first scholars of the second generation would soon take up as early as 1980.

The pioneering book could alienate potential readers for two reasons. It would prove difficult to read for someone who has not mastered Spanish, as it often mingles both languages in a sequential manner akin to that of Chicana/o poets and novelists. Besides, a certain disinterest emerged among French Mexicanists, at a national or local level, when the Spanish departments of French universities were concentrating mainly on the study and publication of celebrated, more familiar Latin American literatures. In comparison, Chicana/o literature to them, even though works in Spanish could be traced far back on U.S. territory, had not acquired in France the legitimacy that would make them canonic. This neighboring discredit may have contributed to the relative absence of funds, regarding the creation of classes devoted to the field of Chicana/o Studies, reluctantly examined and often, at an early stage, dismissed within the university.

Immigration and ethnicity had been a part of classic French academic curricula but had not yet taken as their main object of study Mexican immigration or the Hispanic presence prior to the foundation of the United States. Jean Cazemajou (1986, 1970) a specialist of immigration and ethnicity in the United States, created the first class on Chicana/o literature as early as 1984. In the same period, in Paris University, researcher Geneviève Fabre, a specialist of Black American Studies, started her own trans-Atlantic network, directing an impressive number of doctoral theses dealing with Chicana/o problematics and associating with American Chicana/o scholars. In the wake of her own research in Ethnic Studies, she organized in 1989 in Paris the symposium “Feasts & Celebrations in North American ethnic Communities” that resulted in a 1995 publication, co-edited with professor Ramón Gutiérrez, *Festivals & Celebrations in American Ethnic Communities* (1995), after her recently edited *Parcours identitaires* (1994). She proved to be the main liaison in France between the Chicana/o intelligentsia and the French academic circles by inviting El Teatro Campesino of Luis Valdez to Paris. She directed in 1978 the first master’s thesis to be written in France in Chicana/o Studies on *El Teatro Campesino*, entitled “El Teatro Campesino and Chicano Theater” by then-graduate student Yves-Charles Grandjeat, who later became the director of the American Studies Research Center at Bordeaux 3 University after Jean Béranger and Christian Lerat, his two predecessors, who together initiated four-year programs of “Multilingualism & Multiculturalism” in the United States on hybridity, mixed

identities in the borderlands, and literatures of exile. This lasted from 1980 up to 2006, when the research group was restructured and federated with Linguistics and British Studies, entailing the relative disappearance of Chicana/o Studies at a collective level.

The third pioneer of note, Jean Cazemajou, collaborated with Marcienne Rocard, guest-editing in 1980 number 9 of the young *Revue Française d'Etudes Américaines* (RFEA) entitled *The Stranger in the Literature of the United States*, an opus that introduced to a national and international readership the *pinto* (prisoner) poetry of Jimmy Santiago Baca. Jean Cazemajou was soon thereafter elected as president for five years of the American Studies Association of France (AFEA www.afea.fr), an organization that still influences the orientation of research projects today. In 1985, he edited *Hispanic Minorities in the United States: Ideological Conflicts and Cultural Exchanges (1960–1980)*, a very successful collection of essays that was subsequently re-edited twice.

At Bordeaux University, with a national audience, Jean Béranger was instrumental in gathering the second generation of researchers as early as 1983. He understood the cultural wealth and ideological importance of the new field of Chicana/o Studies and strongly advocated regular publications, generously funding trips abroad to the United States and Mexico. Fellowships were provided every year to members of the research group so that they could participate actively in the actual life of Chicanas/os within society, put together original books that could have a favorable echo among the Chicana/o intelligentsia and not only work as epigones, spend one summer month poring over original material at celebrated libraries such as the San Diego State University Library with Julio Martínez, or later at the Colección Tloque Nahuaque of the University of California at Santa Barbara with its two dedicated librarians, Raquel Quiroz-González and Salvador Güereña, while enjoying the material and intellectual support, company and expertise of Luis Leal, María Herrera-Sobek and Francisco Lomelí, without whom the Bordeaux research would not have been possible.

The heirs of the second generation

Some of the heirs, after 1985, soon became the professors of the second generation. Yves-Charles Grandjeat, the first Chicana/o Studies specialist in France, was ushered into the field by pioneering professor Geneviève Fabre (1994, 1988) who had directed him to Luis Valdez's *El Teatro Campesino* when, as a French teaching assistant at Stanford University, he was able to gather a wealth of material on Chicana/o theater. His first academic paper, in the *French Review of American Studies* (RFEA), followed his attending the 10th TENAZ Festival (National Theater of Aztlán) in 1979 in Santa Barbara, California. His PhD on Chicana/o historiography, politics and literature (1989) was supervised by Geneviève Fabre while he also benefited from the support and expertise of Marcienne Rocard. The dissertation, defended in 1985, the first one in France to ever concentrate on Chicana/o themes, led to a widely circulated book, *Aztlán: erre volée, terre promise* (1989). These were the years when the debate on cultural essentialism in Minority Studies was in full swing, and Grandjeat was looking at material that, he argued, showed Chicana/o identity to be a cultural and political construction, as well as an imaginative poetic construction, whose parameters he sought to identify. These were also years when Chicana/o Studies was just beginning to reach France and more generally Western Europe. After all, the first "European Conference on Latina/o Cultures in the U.S." was held in Germersheim, Germany in 1984, following the invitation of Professor Renate Von Bardeleben, critic Juan Bruce-Novoa and several young German scholars – Horst Tonn, Heiner Bus and Wolfgang Binder – who were already active in the field.

In Bordeaux, Jean Béranger had hired Yves-Charles Grandjeat to teach the first class in France on Chicana/o literature, only to assign him to design the first four-year research project

entitled “Multilingualism & Multiculturalism in the United States” (1990 to 1994). One culminating point in the program was the 1992 international symposium entitled “Interculturalism and the Writing of Difference”. Grandjeat read papers at each of the biennial European conferences on Latina/o Cultures in the United States starting in 1984, and was well connected with European and American scholars in the field. In fact, Jean Béranger accompanied him to the 1992 Madrid conference to invite the participants to come to Bordeaux in 1994, where the Sixth International Conference was held, with 120 participants. Grandjeat’s research was then focused on Chicana/o and Nuyorican poetry, producing critical works on Alurista, Ricardo Sánchez, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Gary Soto and Tato Laviera, and in fiction this included Ana Castillo and Alejandro Morales. His interest was in the literary construction and deconstruction of “identity” in the quest for theoretical paradigms articulating a poetics of politics with regards to intercultural literatures, and the connections between politics, ethics and aesthetics. From 1993 to 2006, he directed three four-year research programs for the Bordeaux group, consolidating the Bordeaux team’s interest in interculturalism, including Chicana/o Studies, although at the time he was moving his research in the direction of Black literature.

Serge Ricard, now a professor emeritus of American Studies and History at the Sorbonne Paris 3 (1990, 1996, Ricard and Gachie-Piñeda 1994) often contributed to CLIMAS, where he focused essentially on Chicana/o literature, more specifically on Rolando Hinojosa’s work and to a lesser extent on three other prominent writers, José Antonio Villarreal, Sandra Cisneros, and Gloria Anzaldúa. His central focus was in the role of language and cultural markers (bilingualism, interlingualism and interculturalism), the centrality of ethnicity for cementing relationships in the community, and the dualism of personalities. Of all four writers, the study of Rolando Hinojosa as a bilingual author has afforded him the most fruitful approach to the understanding of Chicanismo.

Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe now a honorary professor at Montaigne Bordeaux 3 University, abandoned in 1982 the domain of Jewish American literature and spent the next 40 years engulfed in Chicana/o Studies after realizing that living on the border with Spain and her knowledge of the ethnic history of the United States had given her an individual propensity to work on border problematics and bilingualism, among them cultural hybridization, the transcultural passage, desidentification, separatist movements, and Chicanas’ claims for liberation and affirmation. She also focused on minority American cinema in addition to developing a keen interest in Chicana/o poetics (Alurista, Abelardo Delgado and Ricardo Sánchez), which led to her multiple collaborations in Spain, Germany, England, Romania, Mexico and the United States. She has authored, edited or co-edited many books on Chicana/o Studies, often sponsored by the Ministry of Research, including *Ecritures hispaniques aux Etats-Unis: mémoire et mutations*, co-written, (1990), *Cinéma américain: aux marches du Paradis? Le cinéma des minorités ethniques aux Etats-Unis* (1992a), *Vous avez dit Chicana/o: anthologie thématique de poésie Chicana/o* (1994), *Confrontations et métissages*, co-edited, (1995) and *Cinema méfis: représentations de la frontière Mexique/Etat-Unis* (2012). At home, in Bordeaux, she directed more than 40 master’s theses in Chicana/o Studies, mainly written by future secondary school teachers or business executives, among which are a few recent representative examples: “Symbolism of Blood in Cinema: from European Gothic to Mexican-American Gothic/A Comparative Study of Francis Ford Coppola’s *Dracula* (USA 1992) and Alex De La Iglesia’s *Perdita Durango* (USA/Mexico 1997)” by Flora Bameul (2008), “The Literary Expression of a Cultural Renegade: Richard Rodríguez, From Refusal to Acceptance of Roots” by Emilie Poletto (2009), “Joaquín Murrieta, from Social Bandit to Icon of the Chicana/o Movement” by Kirk Oskamp (2011), and “The Border in Cormac McCarthy’s Novels” by Jeffrey Swartwood (2012) – in the latter case followed in 2014 by a widely acclaimed dissertation at Bordeaux 3 University.

Conclusion

We have attempted to account for the intellectual, academic and intercultural adventure of a group of some 20 researchers who have collaborated, over a period of 40 years, in a master-student relationship committed to a common goal. A genealogy of researchers has emerged, accumulating knowledge and passing it on to their heirs, subsequently evolving from the circumscribed Chicana/o identity to the wider Latina/o consensus. The constant focus has continued to be the understanding and analysis of Chicana/o history in its many temporal developments via a self-reflective gaze and an academic commitment. As distant observers and dispassionate analysts, French scholars have generated enlightening analogies, particularly when tackling the issue of national identity as expressed through language and the inescapable hybridization of cultures. One example is the study entitled “The Evolution of Bilingualism in the Poetry of Alurista” by Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe (1992b), which was selected to be published in 55 countries in 1992 by the International American Association of Sociology as representative of a global contemporary problematic.

The activism of French scholars of the second generation did not end with their retirement, particularly in Bordeaux, because it still involves a continued collaboration with the emerging generation of younger “Latina/o scholars”, such as Jim Cohen (Sorbonne Paris 3), Sophie Rachmuhl (Bordeaux Montaigne), Stéphanie Durrans and Jeffrey Swartwood (Polytechnique Paris). In 2013, the city of Bordeaux and the twin city of Los Angeles, organized the *Chicano Dream* exhibit at the Musée d’Aquitaine, encountering an intense resonance with the public of the French Southwest. The curators, Katia Kukawka and Daniel González, based much of the exhibit on Benjamin-Labarthe’s anthology *Vous avez dit Chicana/o: anthologie thématique de poésie Chicana/o* (1993, 1994) containing 60 poems, as the rationale for the museum’s choices. Translated into French with a substantive introduction, a glossary of Mexican, Chicana/o and Náhuatl terms, in order to ensure that the lay person can better appreciate and understand the contents and objective in the poetic efflorescence, the book was re-edited and widely advertised. At the request of the curators, Benjamin-Labarthe delivered the presentation “Chicana/o Art: The Museum in the Street” to accompany the exhibit, with the projection of a collection of slides from SPARC (Social & Public Art Resource Center, Los Angeles).

Prior to this, as an artist in residence for five weeks in Bordeaux, celebrated Los Angeles muralist John Valadez created *in situ* The Bordeaux Mural with the creative collaboration of two young artists, Laurent Bastide and Florence Héry. Together, they created an installation erected in the street outside the museum. Complicit in the choice of emblematic cars, they paid their respect to the emblematic and unpretentious car of French youth in the 1970s, the Citroën 2CV, affectionately nicknamed “deudeuche”. They facetiously associated it on canvas with a Chicana/o Chevy *lowrider* to create the visual symbol of a novel hybridization of popular cultures that spanned different social classes and national boundaries. The mural was extremely popular, celebrating Bordeaux’s strong Hispanic links towards Spain or Spanish-speaking America.

Besides the experience at the said museum, another book triggered the public’s interest: *Cinema métis: représentations de la frontière Mexique /Etats-Unis* (2013) in association with a series of conferences at a national and local level on “The Creolization of Cinema: Discourses on the Mexican-American Border”. French cultural life, beyond the secluded atmosphere of the groves of Academe, is more and more attuned to Chicana/o culture, thanks to the relentless activism of its scholars. They have all benefited from the salient elements of decolonization and the incentive placed on learning the Spanish language.

Today in France the general mood in universities seems to strongly favor diversity instead of singularity and strong, well-delineated identities, while considering that globalization could

generate a prevailing wish for harmonization, if not standardization, and possibly a blurring of national identities. Even though the French continue to be attracted by mixed cultures and complex identities, they more often either look West towards Korean Americans, Sino Americans, Japanese Americans or Arab Americans. Again, hybridity in cultures is appreciated more, in part because of the opening of international markets. In the foundational period that saw intense French forays into Chicana/o Studies, we have envisaged the Mexican roots of the American Hispanic or Latina/o background without being arrogant in its claims nor romantic via exoticism. The main talisman word “Chicana/o”, however, continues to generate intense interest and a search for commonalities.

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