

Introduction: Identity Broodings in Chicana/o Culture

<https://doi.org/10.26262/exna.v0i3.7544>

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It is a distinct honor to organize a special issue for an international audience centered in Greece, another destination where Chicana/o literature and criticism might have an impact. Returning to a key hub of Western civilization is both a challenge and a privilege where this literature attempts to make new in-roads while inviting readers to rightfully expand their notions of American culture and the literary canon.

The field of Chicana/o Studies can best be described as interdisciplinary with its origins in the tumultuous 1960s, when a civil rights movement prevailed in the midst of cultural tensions. That was when Chicanos—people of Mexican ancestry living in the U.S.—critically challenged the American mainstream for the long-standing stereotypical representations, lower social status and fractured identities bestowed upon this ethnic community. An insurgent spirit emerged to recover self-worth and dignity, motivated by a messianic force to redefine ourselves as Chicanos/as, a term that reconnects with indigeneity, as well as reaffirm our Mexican background.

In many ways, we discovered we had lost a sense of our history and our culture, so a renaissance emerged after 1965 by regenerating new voices and views, particularly as it relates to self-representation. Literature became the main vehicle to re-evaluate our position in American society and how we had almost slipped into oblivion. Metaphors such as a “sleeping giant” became popular to indicate our ascension into relevance. Back in 1965, there were around ten million persons of Mexican descent in the country, but now there are at least forty million (plus another twenty million Latinos) to account for the sixty million total. As the largest minority group (Latinos account for one out of seven individuals), we are now seen as a national phenomenon spread as far as New York, North Carolina, Illinois, Washington, Missouri, Wisconsin, Colorado, etc., whereas we used to be seen as inhabitants limited to the Southwest (California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona).

A literary movement by Chicanos first coalesced after 1965 with Luis Valdez’s Teatro Campesino group along with poets Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and Alurista for their neo-indigenist predilections, working-class aesthetics and a barrio-centric poetics, also indulging in indigenous motifs and symbols, while distancing themselves from the technocracy of a capitalist

U.S., which emphasized profits and promoted social divisions. Such writers, and later Ricardo Sánchez, Juan Felipe Herrera and Bernice Zamora, examined their immediate social spaces in order to spur a new consciousness of ethnicity and our own brand of Americanism. The literature then moved into the area of myth (a preference for Aztlán as the homeland of the Aztecs) by identifying the American Southwest as the original Aztlán. A key moment crystalized at this juncture: the recognition of a specific geography to which we belonged; a hybrid linguistic modality (bilingualism, interlingualism, Spanglish or code-switching) was declared as a legitimate form of literary expression; and the term Chicano was embraced by the youth to instill a renewed sense of pride and identity.

Literature written by Chicanos came of age within the revolutionary zeal of the 1970s when Tomás Rivera published *...Y no se lo tragó la tierra / ...And the Earth Did Not Part* (1971), in addition to Rudolfo A. Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972), Miguel Méndez's *Peregrinos de Aztlán* (1974), Alejandro Morales' *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* (1975), and Ron Arias' *The Road to Tamazunchale* (1975). These works offered glimpses of epic representations via a horizontal view of culture and history.

But the full impact of such writings did not entirely mature until Chicanas, as part of the Chicana Postmodern Generation in 1985, a type of second renaissance, came together as a force with which to reckon. The literature has not been quite the same since. The shift was noticeable from a predominantly masculine lens to a female/feminist orientation that encompassed new features: the perspective of *herstory*, the development of a psychic inwardness (or a vertical view within the individual), the preoccupation of women as theoretical subjects, the focus on genderized texts, the inclination to experiment beyond conventional constructs in genre, and the promotion of publishing venues of, by and for Chicana writers. Some salient examples are all from around 1985: Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Helena María Viramontes' *The Moths and Other Stories* (1985), Cecile Pineda's *Face* (1985), Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986), Pat Mora's *Borders* (1986), Cherríe Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* (1986), and shortly thereafter in 1987 the iconic collection by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

In what might be labeled as the Post-Movement period after 1991, Chicanas continue to dominate by concentrating on both craft and thematic reverberations, such as Lucha Corpi in *Eulogy of a Brown Angel: A Mystery Novel* (1992), Graciela Limón in *The Memories of Ana Calderón* (1994), Norma E. Cantú in *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995), Ixta Maya Murray in *Locas* (1997), Josefina López in *Real Women Have Curves* (1996), and others. Then there is the situation of re-issuing works from the far past that resurfaced in new editions, consequently contributing toward the temporal expansion of how the literature should be appraised. Some key works come to mind, especially María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* (1992/1885), Daniel Venegas' *Las aventuras de Don Chipote, o cuando los pericos mamen* (1985/1928), and Luis Pérez's *El Coyote, the Rebel: A Nonfiction Novel by Luis Pérez* (2000/1947) among them.

The 21st century provides many examples of globalized themes as an extension from the end of the 1990s. The literature evinces ever-changing forms, styles and innovations. The mood seems to have changed into one of confidence and full freedom to explore a wide spectrum of topics and representations. In some cases, advocacy and the pursuit of justice persist, but such seriousness is sometimes aligned with greater humor and experimentations. Sometimes works are better received critically abroad than nationally, adding still to another instance of difference. We can find a dead-serious treatment of a series of unexplained deaths from Alicia Gaspar de Alba in *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005) to Luis Alberto Urrea's immigrant spoof in *Into the Beautiful North* (2009), or from Salvador Plascencia's revision of magical realism in *The People of Paper* (2005) to Lalo Alcaraz's iconoclastic graphic novel *La cucaracha* (2004), or from Juan Felipe Herrera's playful *Cinnamon Girl: Letters Found Inside a Cereal Box* (2005) to Rudolfo A. Anaya's folkloric sci-fi *Curse of the Chupacabra* (2006), or from Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's futuristic outer space bondage novel in *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* (2009) to Reyna Grande's riveting immigration novel *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006), and the retrospective works of Alejandro Morales in *River of Angels* (2014) and Tino Villanueva's *So Spoke Penelope* (2013). *Trumpus Caesar* by playwright Carlos Morton was represented in Santa Barbara as a work in progress in 2017 and 2018, and stands out as an acerbic satire on the contemporary Trump presidency, exemplifying a concerted effort to mix humor with social commentary within a quasi-classical format.

We find an explosion of explorations into new topics and reflections in both creative works and criticism. In the latter, there are a number of significant accomplishments worth mentioning that round out what the literature has been producing. These works come into mind: Alan West-Durán's *Latino and Latina Writers* (2004), Nicolás Kanellos' *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Latino Literature* (2008), Ilan Stavans' et al. *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* (2011), Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez's *Cantas a marte y das batalla a Apolo* (2014), Frances R. Aparicio's *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature* (2013), Frederick L. Aldama's *The Routledge Concise History of Latino/a Literature* (2013), and Donald W. Urioste, Francisco A. Lomelí and María J. Villaseñor's *Historical Dictionary of U.S. Latino Literature* (2017). More recently, Francisco A. Lomelí, Denise Segura and Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe edited *Routledge Handbook of Chicana/o Studies* (2019), which contributes toward cementing the discipline of Chicana/o Studies and the literature as a transnational phenomenon that has clearly transcended its early barrio spaces, labor fields and borderlands.

Both Chicana/o Studies and the literature continue to thrive within the confines of university, mainstream and international publication venues. They have reached a maturity and reception that now extend into far-away markets, such as Spain, China, Romania, France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Russia, Korea, Ireland, Poland and Mexico. It is now Greece's turn to incur into this unique ethnic American expression that blends worlds, synthesizes experiences and offers insights into the human condition with which many can identify.

In this sense, Chicana/o Studies have been a matter of ever growing interest in Europe, and since the early eighties conferences have been held in places such as Germersheim (Germany,

1984) or Paris (France, 1986), later on in Groningen (Holland, 2004) or Cork (Ireland, 2011), to name just a few. Due to the turmoil of revolutionary acts against the Cold War period in the old continent and the utopian idealism of the decade of the sixties and seventies, the focus was put on alternative literatures in the U.S. and thus emerging, engaged movements like the Chicana/o's brought an immediate audience in the scholarly world. Although sometimes immersed in global and semantically problematized sections in European Universities, such as Ethnic/Postcolonial Studies, Hispanic/Latino/a Studies—and other times inscribed in Spanish-speaking centers or inversely English Philology Departments or pivoting between them—the truth is that what characterizes this specific American idiosyncrasy is the commingling of multi-language and interdisciplinary cultural codes. It enhances a unique experience that was once defined as “la raza cósmica” / “the Cosmic Race,” fashioned in the 70s by Alberto Urista, “Alurista” (reformulating Vasconcelos), meaning the conglomerate of races and the crucible of diachronic cultures that Mexican-American citizenship carries within its genetic DNA.

Coming to specific countries, in Spain, for obvious historical and cultural reasons, Chicana/o Studies are becoming more and more visible and specific conferences on the topic have been held since the last two decades on a regular basis. At the beginning, specific panels or individual papers on Chicana/o Cultural and Literary Studies were proposed by pioneer delegates in more general and local Anglophone symposia, in numbers that were gradually increasing. A very important part of this evolution is thanks to the arduous work of the Franklin Institute at Universidad de Alcalá (Madrid)—devoted to North American Studies—and, more recently, of the HispaUSA Association, founded to make even more visible the research and tight relations between the Hispanic world in USA and Spain. We should mention José Antonio Gurpegui as the alma mater of this group of enthusiasts, and also Julio Cañero and Francisco Sáez de Adana as former President and current President respectively of the Franklin Institute. So far, eleven conferences have taken place, namely: Granada (U of Granada, 1998); Málaga (U of Málaga, 2002); Sevilla (U of Sevilla, 2004); Alcalá de Henares (U of Alcalá, 2006); Alicante (U of Alicante, 2008); León (U of León, 2010); Toledo (U of Castilla-La Mancha, 2012); Oviedo (U of Oviedo, 2014); Madrid (U of Complutense, 2016); and finally Salamanca (U of Salamanca, 2018). The 12th conference will be held next year in Barcelona (dates 17 to 19 June 2020; topic “The Ethics of Hospitality and Compromise with the Other”). It is worth mentioning that the Association hosts the prestigious Luis Leal award to outstanding scholars in Latino/a culture, and so far Nick Kanellos, María Herrera-Sobek, Gary Keller and our dear co-editor Francisco Lomelí have been recipients of this prize.

A plethora of distinguished Chicana/o creators and scholars have participated in plenary sessions, not only in these specific conferences but also in other more general and broader congresses, symposia, seminars, and other similar Spanish events organized by associations such as AEDEAN (Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies) and SAAS (Spanish Association for American Studies), to name only two of the most relevant of all. A non-inclusive list of the most reputed visiting authors and renowned academics comprise Reyna Grande, Miguel Méndez, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, Ana Castillo, Tino Villanueva, Elena Viramontes,

Alejandro Morales, Alma Luz Villanueva, Norma Elia Cantú, Lucha Corpi, Luis Valdez, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Carlos Morton, Norma Cantú, Santiago Vaquera, Alma López, Cherríe Moraga, in the first category, and Nicolás Kanellos, Tey Diana Rebolledo, Francisco Lomelí, María Herrera-Sobek, Gary Francisco Keller, Gabriel Meléndez, Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez, in the second category.

The Franklin Institute in the collection Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin has also promoted the publication of volumes such as *Envisioning a Decolonial Future: The Poetics of Presentism and Chicana Literature* (2019) by Elsa del Campo Ramírez; *Tradition and (R)evolution: Reframing Latina/o Identities in Contemporary US Culture* (2018) edited by Carmen M. Méndez-García; *The Chican@ Literary Imagination: A Collection of Critical Studies by Francisco A. Lomelí* (2012) edited by Julio Cañero and Juan F. Elices; or *Nuevas reflexiones en torno a la literatura y cultura chicana* (2010), edited by Julio Cañero, among others. The Franklin Institute also edits the Journal *Camino Real*, devoted to the Hispanic world in the United States of America.

On a separate issue, among the European nations as holders of monographic Chicana/o conferences, we should highlight the American Studies program of the University of Groningen, in Holland, with an interdisciplinary approach that includes optional subjects in both Mexican-American and Canadian topics, complementing a major in U.S. literature and culture and thus making possible a true Chicana/o Studies visibility. Also worth mentioning is the University of Bordeaux Montaigne's Cultural Studies program, in France, with an emphasis in Chicana/o and Afro-American subjects, together with The Paris Diderot University and the "Institute of the Americas," in the same city. Last but not least, the University of Mainz/Germersheim, in Germany, pioneered the introduction of Chicano Studies in Europe with two conferences, in 1984 and 1990, that gave rise to the development of transnational collaboration and multidisciplinary focalization. Other German universities have followed suit, like the University of Leipzig's Chair in Minority Studies, or the University of Bielefeld's Inter-American Studies Master's Course.

To a lesser extent, other countries and universities should be mentioned as well: The University of Leeds, in Great Britain, the University of Bergen, in Norway, the University of Lodz, in Poland, Ca'Foscari University of Venice, in Italy, or Antwerp University and Leuven University, in Belgium. More recently, other countries are becoming involved in this discipline, showing a quick and steady evolution. It is the case of Romania, for instance, to which the Latin origin of its language is a great facilitator, or Russia, with some hints inscribed in the Ethnic Studies programs around the Federation.

Finally, we would like to pay special attention to the 2011 Chicana/o conference at University College Cork, Ireland, because it constitutes a good example of cultural interaction and debate. Apart from the academic section, which included plenary speakers Cherríe Moraga and Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and a range of papers focused on television, movies, literature, theory, art, myths, music (including *corridos* and folklore), theater and performance, two art exhibitions were shown: one by Celia Herrera Rodríguez, *EnAguas EnTlalocan / Prayer for Mother Waters*, and the other by Alma López, *Our Lady and Other Queer Santas*. It was

precisely the latter the one that made the event polemic and consequently was put in the spotlight of the Irish media. Being Ireland a staunchly Catholic country with similar moral values to Mexico and by extension to Spain, the use of religious imagery for subverting imposed hegemonic roles and the appropriation and sexualization of Virgin Mary of Guadalupe was received with great controversy. The Irish reception run parallel to the original protests at the 2001 exhibition in the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, showing ultimately and indirectly the imbrications and similarities of seemingly far away identities and proving that Chicana/o Studies bear the vigor of consolidated cultures and the challenges and values of universality.

About the Volume

Identity Broodings in Chicana/o Culture presents some of the ways Chicana/o writers, poets, and generally thinkers attend to the conundrums of self-identity. The collection explores varied types of writings and visual representations that have vied for Chicana/o self-consciousness (*conciencia*) over the years. The essays, though, do not just offer a politicized expression of Chicanas/os against the backdrop of supremacy, capitalism, internal colonialism and personal/communal encroachment. More to the point, the essays in this collection underline the transnational relevance of Chicana/o experience and thinking, and provide proof of the pertinence of Chicana/o Studies in our understanding of identity cognition. Along these lines, this volume suggests the dialogic potential for geographically distanced peoples (in academia and elsewhere), and show that Chicana/o Studies has moved on “from the narrow sociological definition to the broad humanistic, and universal approach” (Leal 32).

In “Más allá de los *Borderlands*: Anzaldúa, Spiritual Activism and Agents of Awakening,” Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez examines Gloria Anzaldúa’s post-*Borderlands* work as a call to erase metaphorical barriers, borders and labels in order to achieve social change. The article cites a plethora of Anzaldúan terminology, including autohistoria-teoría, Coyolxauhqui, conocimiento, nepantla, nos/otras, spiritual activism and new tribalism, and follows the nuanced ways post-*Borderlands* thought has impacted Latina feminism. Most importantly, Quinn-Sánchez advocates that the internalization of theory is obsolete unless coupled with the externalization of spirituality, or what the author terms “the spirituality of total inclusion.” In “Storytelling as Transformation: Disrupting Cycles of Violence through Feminist Sites of Remembrance, Love, and Forgiveness in Emma Pérez’s *Forgetting the Alamo, or, Blood Memory* (2009),” Adrianna Simone takes up the cycles of violence that marked Chicanas as the Texas Republic was founded in the mid-nineteenth century. The article traces Micaela’s travels as a figurative pilgrimage to self-transformation, towards the creation of a new space of consciousness. As Simone claims, Micaela’s final destination is the disruption of the cycles of violence, the creation of an alternate history for herself (*herstory*), and the transformative site(s) of self-cognizance.

In “Dialogical Ecofeminist Perspectives in ‘The Moths’ by Helena María Viramontes and ‘Woman Hollering Creek’ by Sandra Cisneros,” Imelda Martín-Junquera explores the conversational relationship(s) between women and nature. Martín-Junquera offers a brief

overview of previously published analyses of the two narratives, and then takes the stimulating theoretical turn to ecofeminism. The article proposes that the paradigms of submission and passivity and the counter-discourses of resistance and environmental thinking interpenetrate. Drawing from the environmental imaginary that the two short stories create, Martín-Junquera explores the meaningful dialogue that unfolds between women and the physical cosmos. The next article is a fresh critical analysis of Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984). In "The Elusive American Dream: An Ecofeminist Reading of Race and Identity in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984)," Taylor O'Kelley looks into the problematic spatial experiences of a young Chicana, who inhabits the figurative borderlands between the American Dream and the American Nightmare. The article concludes with a succinct statement that one's space of self-definition is proportionate to social change, and that self-empowerment often comes through in the solitary act of literary writing.

Natalia Villanueva-Nieves' contribution is a reading of Lucha Corpi's *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* (1992) through the lens of affect theory. "Discursive Crimes: Chicana Affect and Hegemonic Power in *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* by Lucha Corpi" offers a concise explanation of how hegemonic master narratives (i.e., Anglo-Saxon whiteness, masculinity and heterosexuality) impact Chicana affects. Villanueva-Nieves situates her analysis of Corpi's detective fiction within the power relations between communities of color and hegemonic formations, and she also sketches out a theoretical model that construes the hard-boiled genre in line with theories of subjectivity, materiality and intersectionality.

In "Woman Killing and Adoption in Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005)," Tereza Jiroutová Kynčlová addresses the serial feminicidal violence occurring in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, the twin town to El Paso, Texas. The author discusses feminicide through the conjoined lenses of capitalism, racism and androcentrism, but she also maintains that institutionalized gender violence exceeds the actual deaths of brown women. Jiroutová Kynčlová argues that in *Desert Blood* intercountry adoption is an additional practice of using and abusing Mexican women. The author attends to the unequal power relations among poor Mexican and well-off Mexican-American women, power relations or imbalances that enable the exchange of children for money, or result in the commodification of women's and children's bodies. The next article is Aikaterini Delikonstantinidou's "Brown Medeas: Reconfiguring *Mestizaje* for the 21st Century." This article offers an insight into the "brown Medeas" of Chicana/o theatre. Delikonstantinidou examines three revisions of Medea's myth by Chicana/o theatre practitioners: "La Malinche," by Carlos Morton (1996-97), "The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea," by Cherríe Moraga (2000), and "Mojada: A *Medea* in Los Angeles," by Luis Alfaro (2015). The author discusses the plays parallel to the transcultural flows and negotiations in Chicana/o cultural expressions. This article is informed by the ways the three playwrights received and/or adapted the Greek tragic myth, and the impact Medea's myth has had on the redefinition of *mestizaje* and the manifestation of a decolonial consciousness.

With Carmen M. Méndez-García's "A Wall of One's Own: Latinas Reclaiming Spaces, Subverting Economies, Empowering Communities," we are introduced to the interrelated issues

of gender, space, and ethnicity in three different pieces: Coco Fusco's performance *A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in the New America* (2006), the mural painting *Latino America* (1974) by the Las Mujeres Muralistas group, and the *Venas de la Mujer* installation (1976) at the LA Women's Building by the Las Chicanas group. Méndez-García offers an insightful analysis of space in transition (i.e., from a masculine to a feminine creative activity in space), and concludes with the claim that the Civil Rights Movement may have addressed some of the categories of being-in-the-world, but issues of gender or ethnicity remain unresolved in the 21st century U.S. In "Redrawing the Boundary: From Carlos Fuentes's *La frontera de cristal* (1995) to Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* (2009)," Ana M^a Manzanás Calvo and Paula Barba Guerrero argue for the ongoing dialogue between literature and concerns over globalization, technology and colonial relations of power. The authors do not consider the border a fixed demarcation of national and/or ethnic identities. Instead, they construe the border as a mechanism that attempts to separate, while in reality it allows transgression (by recurrently opening and closing). The article concludes with a powerful statement: the more the *políticos* of the world fortify the borderlines, the more ineffectual borders become.

In "The Unbearable Lightness of Being Fronterizo: Reflections on Border Crossing," Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez unreels his migratory aesthetics, and proposes the potential of absolute freedom when one embraces the "unbearable lightness of being fronterizo." Drawing from Milan Kundera's literary writings, Vaquera-Vásquez traverses in time and space, flirts with transhistoricism and transnationalism, in an article that hosts the esoteric reflections of a border crosser, of a thinker who takes on the *fronterizo* practice. The final contribution to this volume proudly presents selections from a work in process by playwright Carlos Morton. Written in response to the election of Donald Trump for the presidency of the U.S., *Trumpus Caesar* parodies William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Morton graciously contributed to this volume a "fragment" of *Trumpus Caesar*, a play that can be analyzed as rhetoric of awareness, a work of art that certainly verges on the comic/sarcastic, but one that is largely infused with the cleansing effects that socio-political alertness can have on the readers/audience.

Yiorgos Kalogeras' review of *Tradition and (R)evolution: Reframing Latina/o Identities in Contemporary US Culture* (2018) underlines the lasting significance of identity politics among minority groups. Edited by Carmen M. Méndez-García, this collection of essays focuses on Latina/os, Chicana/os, Hispanics, and the varied ways they are represented in contemporary society, such as traditional practices, literary undertakings and (post) border experience. Kalogeras deems the volume a valuable addition to a researcher's bibliography, and a project that "merits the attention of a wider audience." The current ecological crisis, climate change and toxicity are the focus of M. Isabel Pérez-Ramos' review of Priscilla Solis Ybarra's *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (2016). According to Pérez-Ramos, the book offers insights into the decolonial environmentalisms that Chicana/o literature tackles, and suggests that communion with nature poses a challenge to mainstream lifestyle and socio-economic master narratives.

Tino Villanueva has kindly given us permission to feature his painting *Dreamscape* (1989) for this volume's cover. The painting reflects our "dream" to expand the scope of Chicana/o Studies in broader and diverse fields of analyses, to pursue further the effort to strengthen the transnational connections among group identities around the world, and to offer readers the opportunity to see the analogies of lived experience across spatial and temporal boundaries: difference may after all mean likeness!

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