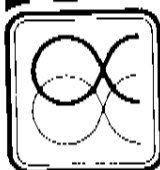


0957-1558

# French Cultural Studies

Volume 12 Part 1 Number 34 Pp. 1-120

February 2001



## Regionalist accents of global music: the Occitan rap of *Les Fabulous Trobadors*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Popular music has been an important source of language for youth subcultures for most of the twentieth century, especially when disseminated by the recording industry. Generally speaking, youth subcultures focus on what they perceive to be new and urban. Regional minority languages, more typically associated with what is old and rural, have been excluded from the process of mediatization until recently. This article examines the 1990s phenomenon of Occitan rap and raggamuffin groups and their self-conscious promotion of minority languages through the media. We focus in particular on the music of Les Fabulous Trobadors who claim to link those who say 'òc' for 'oui' and those who say 'yo' for 'yes,' and use transnational contemporary musical forms to emphasize the horizontal ties of non-dominant cultures. First, we look at forms of transmission of this group's music, and then turn to how this group has reinterpreted certain historical imagery. Of special interest is its nostalgia for a hybrid medieval world sheltered from national centralization. We look at the privileging of the local along with the acknowledgement of global influences, paying particular attention to language use and levels of understanding.

The Fabulous Trobadors, composed of Ange B and Claude Sicre, first came on the French popular music scene in 1992 with the recording 'Era pas de faire.' Ange B (Jean-Marc Enjalbert, known as the 'Human Juke Box') came

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<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this article was delivered at the 1994 American Anthropological Association Meetings. It has benefited from the comments of David McMurray, Ted Swedenburg, and Joseph Krause. We also appreciate the secretarial help of Claire Younger.

out of the rap milieu, living in Toulouse with his eyes fixed on New York. In 1986, he met up with Claude Sicre, director of the ethnomusicology section of the Institute of Occitan Studies and they formed The Fabulous Trobadors. Their first recording, in 1992, has been followed by two others in 1995 and 1998. The media have found an interesting and articulate spokesperson in Claude Sicre, who is more than willing to expound upon his favourite theories of the role of local cultures in the modern world.

Southern France has long been seen as a repository of 'tradition,' especially in terms of verbal art. In the spirit of what Michel de Certeau calls 'la beauté du mort',<sup>2</sup> throughout years of the new Third Republic the southwest was studied by many folklorists, who documented the disappearing oral and musical traditions of the Landes piney woods or of isolated Pyrenean mountain valleys. After a post-World War Two period of revivalism which took place in a number of the French regions, traditional folkloric music competed up through the 1960s with other forms, including modern rock and pop. In the 1970s French traditional music underwent a second revival, as part of a larger movement that would support the political decentralization of 1982 and a return to the regions. The Fabulous Trobadors are leaders in a new phase of French regional music that reinterprets the musical traditions of southern France within a context of the global appetite for local culture.

### Transmission

The media call it ethnorap, Occitan rap or Occitan raggamuffin.<sup>3</sup> Sicre does not call The Fabulous Trobadors' music 'rap,' but grants that it is similar to rap in its use of rapid elocution, melodies with low amplitude, and the use of the mouth to mime the sounds of musical instruments. Sicre asserts, however, that these features characterized early Occitan music as well. In fact, he credits the thirteenth-century troubadour, Jean Bretel, with inventing rap.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> M. de Certeau, *La Culture au pluriel* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1980), 50, 56-9. In his chapter entitled 'La beauté du mort' de Certeau contrasts the first half of the nineteenth century, in which popular culture was the object of surveillance and repression in France, and the end of the century, which he terms the 'belle époque du folklore', when, after having been controlled and neutralized, popular culture would be 'retrieved' by scholars in a salvage effort of nostalgia.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'raggamuffin' has several etymologies. In many dictionaries of contemporary music, Jamaican-inspired forms of music that involve mismatched bass and drum characterize 'jungle' while songs with a rap vocal are called 'ragga.' 'Ragga' may be a variant on 'reggae.' The term 'raggamuffin' can indicate a street urchin, whose image certain musicians such as Claude Sicre, profiled here, try to cultivate. Such a performer makes music spontaneously, in public, and is not an 'artist.' Ragga music is identified in a range of national musical contexts.

<sup>4</sup> J. Gaudas, 'Avec ou sans Sicre? Claude Sicre ou l'homme de la situation', *Le Nouveau Politis* (June 1993), 56; F. Roy, '[Musique:] Les Fabulous Trobadors, ethnorappeurs', [*Valeurs*] *MGEN* #149 (January 1993). When we first began this project, we obtained a press packet about The Fabulous Trobadors by a Rondage agent in Paris. This packet was very useful, though it was difficult to

Early Occitan music and rap are also linked through poetic duelling.<sup>5</sup> Medieval troubadours engaged in verbal duels and Toulouse has long been the renowned centre of the *Jeux Floroux*, a poetic competition first established in 1323 that has been revived several times over the centuries.

In addition to poetic duelling, The Fabulous Trobadors make use of the medieval genre of the *canço-sirventès* in many of their musical compositions. The *sirventès* is poetry composed spontaneously for an occasion, presenting the medieval troubadour poet's personal situation, along with a moral comment on society. Sicre makes use of this historical southern genre through which to channel modern concerns, against a backdrop of electronic and/or minimalist musical accompaniment.<sup>6</sup>

The modern day troubadours differ from the nineteenth-century Romantic Nationalists who played such a prominent role in folklore revivals because they operate under the theory that those who try to preserve local languages and cultures kill them. Their terrain of action is not the academy, but their neighbourhood and eventually all neighbourhoods. Their goal is not purity, but hybridity. They do not see themselves as faceless 'bearers of tradition,' nor as creative artists, but as urban griots, or as 'folklore engineers'. Sicre, for example, presides over the *Carrefour Culturel Arnaud Bernard*, which functions as a community centre and sponsors sidewalk philosophers and neighbourhood potlucks, all in an effort to revive face-to-face communication in this mediatized world.<sup>7</sup> Sicre himself began singing in marketplaces and

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construct full references from some of the sources. What we did find was how often similar text appears in different publications. While we think this is characteristic of the popular press in general, it is even more pronounced in light of the fact that much of the information comes directly from interviews with Claude Sicre.

<sup>5</sup> Sicre, like most French academics, stresses the pre-technological roots of rap in African-American and Caribbean oral traditions, rather than its post-technological genesis in the present economic urban crisis. See T. Rose, 'A style nobody can deal with: politics, style and the postindustrial city in hip hop', in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, A. Ross and T. Rose (eds) (New York: Routledge, 1994), 71-88, for a further discussion of this phenomenon. In his chapter on the music of contemporary Italian posses, Mitchell cites the work of Loredana Lipperini, who argues that the ritual insults and verbal jousting that are endemic to rap have some home-grown historical and traditional precedents, such as the calls of washerwomen portrayed in Baroque madrigals (T. Mitchell, *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop, and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 162).

<sup>6</sup> The Larousse Encyclopedia states that the term 'sirventès' derives from the verb 'servir' (to serve), and is a poem composed by a mercenary soldier hired by his lord to serve through poetry as well as through weapons. Sicre's choice of the *canço-sirventès* is a strategic reinscription of 'medieval heritage' since the modern popular culture genre of the *poésie de circonstance* could serve the same function.

<sup>7</sup> The web address for the Arnaud Bernard Cultural Crossroads is <http://www.marcmav.org/homepage/ailleurs/repas.html>. In addition to bringing food to a public place to share with others, participants are asked to bring their speech and their culture. Since Sicre proposed these dinners back in 1991, dozens of cities around France have sponsored them. Mitchell underscores the important performance context of *centri sociali* which were semi-illegal, alternative, self-organized activity centres for Italian posses and their music (T. Mitchell, *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop, and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 146-54).

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continues to encourage face-to-face communication by performing at numerous festivals. Many of these festival settings are located throughout southern France (Toulouse, Uzeste, Marseilles, Correns, Albi) but The Fabulous Trobadors also perform in other regions of France (avoiding Paris), in the DOM of La Réunion and in selected locations abroad (Montreal, Lisbon).

Initially Sicre was suspicious about putting out a recording, thinking that the product would detract from the process of spontaneous musical creation and the sense of community that it provides. Unrecorded musical groups, however, are not picked up to play in festivals. In the light of this concern, The Fabulous Trobadors called their first recording, *Era pas de Faire* or *Ce n'était pas à faire*.<sup>8</sup> Considering that the home is the centre of entertainment in contemporary times, Sicre must realize that it should have been done and gave the recording such a title as an empty protest.<sup>9</sup>

Not wanting to get sucked into the commercial world dominated by Paris, The Trobadors released their first CD through Rocker Productions, a regional label out of Marseilles formed by the Provençal group Massilia Sound System.<sup>10</sup> They sold 20–30,000 copies of this recording, reaching more people in a short time than in decades of face-to-face singing in marketplaces and local gatherings in southern France. This must have made Sicre more comfortable with the mediatization of his work, and the next two recordings came out with major multinational music production companies.<sup>11</sup>

Sicre has found the media useful in other ways as well. He emphasizes musical form and function over text, but his ability to grant articulate interviews with members of the national and international press has certainly increased the impact of his music. But Sicre's involvement in the media is not merely a commercial strategy, to increase sales. In 1995 he took his voice to the local free radio stations of *Radio Campus* and *Radio Mon Pois* to protest the restructuring of his neighbourhood in central Toulouse.<sup>12</sup>

An even more important use of modern media is Sicre's close involvement

<sup>8</sup> In C. Casser, 'Claude Sicre et "Les Fabulous Trobadors"', *Art de Vivre*, iv–v (1993), 108.

<sup>9</sup> J. Forbes, 'Popular culture and cultural politics', in *French Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, J. Forbes and M. Kelly (eds) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 233.

<sup>10</sup> Rocker Productions launched IAM, the best-selling rap group in France with over 900,000 albums sold. IAM also has a strong local connection and a philosophy of pan-Mediterranean multiculturalism.

<sup>11</sup> At the time of the FT's first release, six recording companies controlled 83% of the French market: BMG, EMI, Polygram, Barclay, Warner, and Sony (D. Laing, '"Sadness", scorpions and single markets: national and transnational trends in European popular music', *Popular Music*, xi (2) (1992), 129). Without the backing of one of these companies, commercial triumph is highly unlikely. The Fabulous Trobadours have signed on with Mercury – a subsidiary of Polygram – a major player in the finanscape of global music (M. Roberts, '"World music" and the global cultural economy', *Diaspora*, ii (2) (1992), 229–49).

<sup>12</sup> C. Sicre, 'La Ville habitée, les occupés, etc.' <http://altern.org/linha/vilhab.htm> (27 October 1998).

with the world-wide web. Sicre's project is to unite local cultures through the web journal, *Linha Imaginòt*, a publication of the musical division of the Institute of Occitan Studies and the GRQM (Grande Révolution des Quartiers du Monde). Its title ironically alludes to the Ligne Maginot, but the purpose of the new line is to include disparate regions into their own imagined community, rather than to exclude different national cultures, as the original military boundary had aimed to do. The table of contents and article summaries of *Linha Imaginòt* are regularly posted on the web, where the viewer can choose to view it in three languages: Occitan, English and Picard. Use of Occitan can appeal to regionalists throughout the linguistic space of southern France, whereas English can draw in young people who do not have a particular interest in regionalism, as well as outsiders. The introduction of Picard, a northern dialect of the medieval *langue d'oïl*, is a fairly new development.<sup>13</sup> Through web sites readers can access song lyrics, interviews and concert schedules of The Fabulous Trobadors and of other French regionalist groups. In the Trobadors' latest album the address of *Linha Imaginòt* is posted, hooking up those who are attracted by the music with on-line discussions of the Great Revolution of Neighbourhoods of the World.

The web offers a new mode of transmission for marginal voices and Sicre makes a special point of interviewing marginalized academics on his pages as he rails against the hypercentralization of the French State. In so doing Sicre joins many other speakers of European local languages who have shown themselves very ready to bypass the monolingual dominance of established publishers on the national scene and leap directly into international discourse. Sicre rejects linguistic and cultural nationalism and welcomes new technologies with these words: 'Internet, c'est la même démarche. Il n'y a plus un maître. Tous sont des maîtres. Le monde est branché.'

### Using history

In the summer of 1996, in an outlying suburb of Lyon, a local cultural organization held a festival called 'Nuit de Métissage'. One of the organizers handed out leaflets entitled 'Vive Le Sud' which began with a discussion of the Muslim Arab scholar Ibn Rusd<sup>14</sup> who lived eight centuries ago in

<sup>13</sup> Sicre travelled to the very north of France, the Pas-de-Calais area, in 1995, and in 1997, he put on a workshop in Libercourt, a depressed former mining community, in a move to encourage local residents to speak, write and sing about their history and daily lives. The Picard contact may derive from a quite personal contact, because one of its performers, a tale-teller (cited as a *trevadaire*) named Christian Dequesnes, is now profiled in M. Azema, 'Parlache avec Christian Dequesnes', *Linha Imaginòt*, xxxiv (summer 1997). The web address of the journal is <http://www.multimania.com/simorre/linha>.

<sup>14</sup> Known as Averroës, born in Cordoba in 1126.

Andalucia. He preserved the teachings of Aristotle and his teachings were, in turn, preserved by both Jews and Christians. The handout went on to discuss the spirit of tolerance under which people of different beliefs and languages lived in southern France before the Albigensian Crusade. The next paragraph described the lyrical love poetry that came out of Africa and grew into the poetry of the troubadours, who brought southern France cultural recognition far beyond its borders.<sup>15</sup> This was the glorious period of the Occitan language which came to an end with the early thirteenth-century Albigensian Crusade that was sanctioned by the Pope and carried out by northern French armies for political and economic gain more than for religious purposes.

The headliner of the festival was the Marseilles-based Occitan raggamuffin group Massilia Sound System. This group has a similar profile to The Fabulous Trobadors. They make use of Provençal, the eastern variant of the medieval *langue d'oc*, in some of their songs. Like their Toulousain counterparts, they promote local culture in a global context. Some say that it was through their contact with Claude Sicre that they began singing in Provençal,<sup>16</sup> but Lo Papet (alias Jali) of Massilia Sound System says that the two groups arrived at the same point by different means. The Fabulous Trobadors began with folklore and moved towards hip hop, whereas Massilia Sound System began with hip hop and moved towards folklore.<sup>17</sup> The latter group of musicians also refers to themselves as troubadours, in which, like other Occitanophones, they find the word '*trouver*'. What they are trying to find is the lost sense of community and conviviality that was central to Occitan culture.<sup>18</sup> Massilia Sound System promotes this vision through their *chourmo*, a posse/mutual aid society that includes 700 people all over France.<sup>19</sup>

Both Occitan musical groups exhibit a nostalgia for the medieval multiculturalism celebrated in the leaflet, '*Vive le Sud*': a time before the imposed linguistic purism of nation-states cut off the life-lines of so many local languages and cultures and before racism erected an impermeable cultural barrier between Africa and Europe. Sicre's attraction for the

<sup>15</sup> Menocal (1987) supports the vision of multicultural multilingual Andalusia reflected in its forms of verbal art. In her study of the poetic form, *muwashshah*, she found that the main stanzas were written in Classical Arabic, but the final strophe was in the Romance vernacular, Mozarabic. This multilingualism posed a fundamental problem to later scholarship. The departure from Classical Arabic excluded the poems from the Arab domain, while the Romance scholars peeled off the Mozarabic strophes and ignored the rest. Romance philologists also managed to overlook the close phonological and semantic relationship between the Arabic word *TRABAR*, meaning to sing, and the Romance variations of *TROUBADOUR*.

<sup>16</sup> A. Vivant, 'Les chercheurs d'oc', *Rock Parade* (1992), 5.

<sup>17</sup> A. Kyrou, <http://www.virgin.fr/html/megactu/interview/massilia.html> (7 January 2000), 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



troubadours comes partially from their promotion of cultural pluralism, he claims.<sup>20</sup>

The modern-day troubadours' guiding light is the philosopher Félix Castan, author of the *Manifeste multiculturel (et anti-régionaliste) – 30 ans d'expérience décentralisatrice*.<sup>21</sup> Sicre introduced Castan's work to the musicians of Massilia Sound System and both groups invoke his name in their songs and web discourse.<sup>22</sup> Following Castan, Sicre advocates a return to the baroque in defiance of the post-revolutionary nation-state and its monologic language policies. He expresses The Fabulous Trobadors' desire to re-make French folklore from the neighbourhood up as a first step towards a great revolution of neighbourhoods of the world. Music and the media play important roles in this revolution.

The high percentage of immigrants in Sicre's home town of Toulouse gives the city neighbourhoods he is referring to a multicultural dimension and works against the linguistic purism which often infects regional language movements. The multilingualism of Sicre's neighbourhood of Arnaud Bernard is mirrored on their first CD through snatches of Arabic and Italian conversation and the imitation of Arabic music and ululation in the song, 'Tétons'. This trend of representing a variety of languages continues on their later recordings.

The Fabulous Trobadors' songs promote their vision of a tolerant, multicultural southern French society, in opposition to local right-wing political forces by offering alternative interpretations of well-known historical figures and events. For example, children's French history texts typically present the great Charles Martel who defeated the Arabs in Poitiers in 732. In more recent years, Poitiers has become a powerful symbol for Le Pen's National Front as the site of victory against Arab encroachment. The Trobadors, in contrast, proclaim Poitiers as the site of their defeat: a northern victory over a multicultural artistic Mediterranean culture.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> J. Denis, 'Troubadours d'hier et d'aujourd'hui', *Qantera*, xii (July–August 1994) 57.

<sup>21</sup> Cocagne, Montauban 1984. Castan has edited the writings of Olympe de Gouges, author of the 1791 *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne* (which was never formally adopted by the revolutionary Assembly, however). She was born in Castan's home town of Montauban, located one hour's drive northwest of Toulouse. Castan has also edited the writings of the turn-of-century folklorist/schoolteacher Antonin Perbosc. Sicre makes no reference to these writings, however, and strictly presents Castan as the creator of theories of cultural decentralization. Ironically, a footnote to Sicre's track #3 'Riu chiu chiu' on his latest CD notes that Félix Castan has always been excluded from membership in the Institute of Occitan Studies, where Sicre heads up the musical division (C. Sicre, *Fabulous Trobadors, On the Linha Imaginôt*, Mercury 558772-2 (1998)).

<sup>22</sup> In the third recording of the Fabulous Trobadors, they have even set a Félix Castan lecture to music. (Fabulous Trobadors, *On the Linha Imaginôt* (1998) Mercury 558772-2).

<sup>23</sup> 'Te mets pas (M)martel en tête. Pour nous Poitiers fut une défaite', Come on Every Baudis CD1. 'Martel' has three references here: part of the idiomatic expression in French that translates as to get very worked up about something, 'Charles Martel' who presumably defeated the Arabs at Poitiers, and Martel cognac from Charente.

Rather than portraying the Tower of Babel as a site of biblical punishment, the Trobadors paint a positive image of this symbol of multilingualism. In their lyrics, Babel is dragged out of the Eastern Mediterranean and into a more familiar landscape, but, significantly, both south and north of the Mediterranean Sea. In one song, the analogy is drawn between this famous symbol of multilingualism and its partial homophone Bab el Oued, a town in Algeria.<sup>24</sup> In another song, the different languages are said to colour like a rainbow the town of Babel, which is renamed *Babylone sur Garonne*. This latter name, referring to Toulouse on the Garonne River, pays homage to the biblical symbol of exile picked up by Rastafarians and popularized through reggae music.

The multilingual form of this song mirrors the image of the Tower of Babel, for in its last two stanzas it presents first lines in French, followed by lines in English, making specific reference to these languages and to others, including breaking into Occitan within the English-language lines:

1. le français et l'anglais
2. l'occitan, le catalan
3. Sans oublier je les connais
4. les langues des immigrés
5. We are poor lonesome Griots
6. Of the South and of the West
7. Avem de cançons sul pots (With songs on our lips)
8. Flying under the cuckoo's nest.

These verses inscribe the listener in multiple cultural contexts, for Sicre qualifies his group as griots, the term for West African performers of oral tradition, even as he makes a reference to Western Americana. Western Americana comes through both in the image of the lonesome cowboy going off into the sunset singing a tune (an image picked up by the French comic, Lucky Luke) and to Ken Kesey's novel, then film, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Sicre's second CD features two songs that speak to Arab culture in Toulouse: its third track 'Toulouse est Sarrazine (Toulouse is Saracen)' has as its refrain, 'Toulouse est tout à la fois; Arnaud Bernard est concubine avec toutes les diasporas' and calls for '*l'avenir à l'harissa*'<sup>25</sup> as it portrays Antilleans, Maghribis, Jews, Palestinians and Portuguese as living in harmony. This image of a multicultural South is mirrored by Patric Chóffrut in the September 1999 *Le Monde des débats*. Chóffrut ends his piece by

<sup>24</sup> Fabulous Trobadors, 'Come On Every Baudis', *Era pas de faire*, CD (1992).

<sup>25</sup> The refrain translates as 'Toulouse is everything; Arnaud Bernard [Sicre's neighborhood, located west of the Capitole and City Hall] lives with all diasporas' and 'the future is in harissa.'

inviting the so-called Republicans to tour the 'Republic of Marseilles' so that they can attend a Massilia Sound System concert where everyone sings in French and Occitan, from the blackest to the most North African to the blondest.<sup>26</sup> A later song 'Pasqua/Fatimah' critiques former Interior Minister Charles Pasqua's politics of immigration.<sup>27</sup> The anonymous Fatimah got expelled from France, the song goes, because Pasqua did not give her papers. Sicre's latest CD *On the Linha Imaginèt* is less explicit in its references to hybrid Franco-Arabic culture. But his song 'Lò fafa' ('Blues for the tin metal-worker') addresses the theme of race and ethnicity. It takes a traditional refrain from Languedocian, the central variant of Occitan, but instead of featuring a shepherdess responding to her love, as in the *pastourelle*, it presents a modern-day couple. A middle-class lawyer's daughter rejects the dirty metal-worker's advances with 'Vai-te'n, vai-te'n, paioleire Sias nègre coma un talpat' ('Casse-toi, casse-toi, l'étameur T'es noir comme une taupe'), to which he counters: 'Terra negra fa bon blat' ('C'est la terre noire qui fait le bon blé'). In this couplet, Sicre reappropriates a traditional Occitan proverb and inscribes it, ironically, in National Front discourse, via the image of blood lines and soil. In so doing, he substitutes his own vision of a multicultural hybrid southern space.

Privileging the image of a tolerant multicultural Occitan culture dating from the Middle Ages conveniently erases the neo-Herderian coupling of race, language and territory that characterized the Occitan Party in the 1970s via its chief ideologue François Fontan. It also masks the high level of support for the National Front in certain parts of southern France, particularly in the Bouches-du-Rhône.

The Fabulous Trobadors line up with most other world music and hip hop groups in France in standing against racism and cultural and economic imperialism and for a multicultural France that highlights local experience without denying post-colonial migrations.<sup>28</sup> However, The Fabulous Trobadors do not talk about the life most racial others live in the bleak French *banlieues*, whose environment is represented by hardcore rap groups like IAM and NTM. The Trobadors' music is playful and inclusive. They criticize

<sup>26</sup> P. Choffrut, 'Le vote protestataire des Occitans', *Le Monde des débats* (September 1999), 16.

<sup>27</sup> In 1993 Minister of the Interior Charles Pasqua announced that his goal was zero immigration and then enacted a series of restrictive measures on immigration which were complemented by rigorous identity card controls and a reform of the nationality code, which meant that young people born in France of foreign parents were no longer automatically French citizens. The laws created new categories of people who were not entitled to full residence permits, and all the attached social rights, but who could not be deported because they were the parents of French children. Ambiguity and arbitrary administrative measures gave rise to many cases where people who had been living and working legally in France for many years found themselves denied a legal status and at risk for deportation (C. Lloyd, 'Race and Ethnicity' in *Modern France* (London: Routledge, 1999) 34–52).

<sup>28</sup> C. Warne, 'The impact of world music in France', 133–49, and S. Cannon, 'Panama city rapping: B-boys in the Banlieues and beyond', 150–66, both in A. Hargreaves and M. McKinney (eds), *Post-colonial Cultures in France* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

the government, but do not speak specifically to French racism and police violence. The vengeance called for is not in response to contemporary racially motivated murders that people read about in the newspaper, but to the Crusades, which took place seven centuries ago.<sup>29</sup> The line telling people to avenge the Crusades is followed not by a reference to armed violence, but by a line telling someone to remember a local dessert. The erasure of some of the more painful moments in French and Occitan relations with 'outsiders' lends the work of the Fabulous Trobadors a utopian air and probably makes for more 'easy listening' by a white audience.

### Droit à la différence musicale

One way to examine the issue of globalization is to analyse the multiple world musics that inspire The Fabulous Trobadors: American blues, Northeast Brazilian poetic duelling, Jamaican reggae, and global rap. Although The Fabulous Trobadors often deny the label 'rap,' they are sympathetic to the hip hop stance of anti-racism and Afrocentrism. The Fabulous Trobadors join the anti-racist struggle by peppering their songs with a multicultural salad of references, as well as by singing about equality on the one hand and Pasqua's immigration laws on the other. Sicre sees Africa in the role of teacher, when it comes to music and culture, and says that Europe has nothing to give in this domain.

The Fabulous Trobadors rejected an invitation from the AFAA (*Agence française artistique*) to perform in Africa, which Sicre sees as supporting a neo-colonialist stance. In an interview, Sicre commented:

'Sur le plan pratique, je me vois mal aller faire l'artiste en Afrique, avec de l'argent français, pour des Africains qui prennent tout ce qu'on leur donne, parce qu'on leur donne et que c'est le pape-français qui envoie, public captif comme ceux des animations dans les hôpitaux, alors que c'est l'Afrique qui musicalement, culturellement, a des choses urgentes à nous apprendre à nous Français...' 'D'ailleurs c'est pas un hasard, je ne peux pas me dire artiste, la France a besoin de musiciens folkloriques, pas d'artistes putain on en a trop, de soi-disant artistes. Je crois que ça leur ferait du bien à tous d'aller en résidence en Afrique. 3 ou 4 ans. Avec le salaire moyen africain.'<sup>30</sup>

Sicre has accepted to perform in La Réunion, one of the French island DOM, however, in support of a pluralistic vision of Francophone identity. This action was paralleled by his duo's participating in the annual Francofolies music festival held in Montreal in 1997.

<sup>29</sup> This is taken from the song 'Pas de çà' (C. Sicre, Fabulous Trobadors, *Era pas de faire* CD, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> This interview appears in *Linha Imaginôt* posted on the Web <http://www.multimania.com/simorre/linha>. Issue 34 (Summer 1998).

As an ethnomusicologist, Sicre searched for authentic Occitan music for about two decades. He finally found it being played by mixed-race street singers (*repentistas*) in Northeastern Brazil. He even saw the similarities in the languages of Portuguese and Languedocian and envisions sixteenth-century Portuguese travellers as having learned the troubadour style of Occitanic, importing it to Portugal and on to Brazil where it was preserved, as if in a museum.<sup>31</sup> The *repentistas* improvise while accompanying themselves on the tambourine. Sicre adopted this style and this instrument, rejecting instruments associated with southern French regional folklore. In so doing, he joined other First World musicians who have tapped into Third World musics, commodifying both authenticity and difference in the contemporary world music scene.<sup>32</sup> Sicre denies the Brazilian musicians' modernity, regarding them instead as bearers of troubadour traditions and not as actors in the hybrid Caribbean musical scene. At the same time he claims modernity for Occitan music, tapping into the global youth attraction for the hybrid hip-hop culture of the African diaspora.<sup>33</sup> Sicre's tambourine is prominent, but the 'modern' sound of The Fabulous Trobadors comes from scratching, mixing and sampling: techniques developed by Black youth in the South Bronx which hit France with the 1982 New York City Rap Tour.<sup>34</sup>

Sicre credits America with his ideas of cultural democracy and he claims that American popular culture has invaded the world not because of America's economic force, but because America has maintained cultural pluralism. France, on the other hand, silenced the multiplicity of languages/cultures/musics within its borders and enforced uniformity. For example, Sicre says that modern American music grew out of folk traditions, whereas the French lost connections with their musical roots as the French State imposed songs disconnected from folk tradition and local cultures through the centralized school system.

In fact, Sicre's wish, spurred on in part by his musical producers perhaps, is to 'conquer the West' and to perform in the United States, where he would be obliged to create all of his songs in English:

'Le responsable de l'AFAA ... nous a dit: "Effectivement, les Américains peuvent être intéressés, parce que c'est original, le rock, le jazz, le rap français ils s'en foutent, le grand public, ils ont déjà, ils veulent pas d'imitations provinciales." Sicre added: "Je suis prêt à aller jouer dans le

<sup>31</sup> C. Fioravante, 'A França matou seu folclore, diz Sicre', *Folha de São Paulo* (20 December 1993) 5.

<sup>32</sup> J. Gross, D. McMurray and T. Swedenburg, 'Arab noise and Ramadan nights: Rai, Rap and Franco-Maghrebi identity', In L. Smadar and T. Swedenburg (eds), *Displacement, Diaspora and the Geographies of Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of a similar sort in the Spanish Basque region, see J. Urla, 'Contesting modernities: language standardization and the production of an ancient/modern Basque culture', *Critique of Anthropology*, xiii (June 1993) 2.

<sup>34</sup> The first compilation of French rap 'Rapattitude' came out in 1990.

méto ou dans les trucks-stops et à recevoir des cannettes de bière sur la gueule comme les Blues Brothers. Nous c'est les Phallus Blues Brothers, 'Trobadors'".<sup>35</sup>

### Using language

As we mentioned earlier, the multicultural anti-racist stance of The Fabulous Trobadors does not distinguish them from the majority of popular musicians of the world beat or hip hop variety in France today. Their pro-multi-lingual stance does not distinguish them either. Nor does their confidence in the 'power of the word.' What is more unique is their use of a 'territorialized' minority language of France rather than an immigrant language or a new, urban variety.<sup>36</sup> By using Occitan, The Fabulous Trobadors can draw on a history of exclusion and discrimination which, in some way, parallels the situation of the maligned immigrants and youth musicians of contemporary France.

The regionalists of the 1970s (which included Sicre) also link Occitan back to the Middle Ages, mythologizing about an imagined historical community. In their active promotion of Occitan, they differentiated themselves, on the one hand, from native speakers, who could only view their particular linguistic variety as a highly localized *patois*, and, on the other hand, from the urban middle-classes, who felt themselves far removed from France's regional languages and for whom standard French was the only language of reference.<sup>37</sup> The regionalists also differentiated themselves from other, more recent immigrant groups, for whom French was a second language.

If the earlier thrust of minority regional language movements was to underscore linguistic purity and to separate out a select group from the masses, Sicre's present support for Occitan communicates a quite different message. He comments: 'C'est le fait qu'en défendant l' Occitan, on est plus sensible partout au problème des langues.'<sup>38</sup> And, in a riff from his 1995 CD,

<sup>35</sup> This interview appears in *Linha Imaginôt* posted on the Web <http://www.multimania.com/simorre/linha> Issue 34 (Summer 1998).

<sup>36</sup> It is fairly common to find glossaries included in French hip hop recordings.

<sup>37</sup> These linguistic cleavages between social groups are paralleled in Chapman's study of Celtic music in Brittany. Local residents, actual speakers of the local Celtic language. Chapman found, know little or nothing about 'traditional' Celtic music. Within a genuinely vernacular local sphere, the popular instruments are not, say, the harp or the bagpipe, but rather the piano accordion, the electric organ, the electric guitar, the radio and the television. Chapman found that the biggest linguistic enthusiasts are those who learned Celtic languages as teenagers or adults, and this population makes up the élite of contemporary Celtic ethnic consciousness. M. Chapman, 'Thoughts on Celtic music' in M. Stokes (ed.), *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> Interview, Virgin 1999.

he repeats the phrase 'L'occitan qu'es accro?'<sup>39</sup> ('What *is* Occitan?'), following it immediately with 'I know you're gonna dig this.' Here The Fabulous Trobadors appeal to contemporary urban (French) youth, whose most important foreign language is English, as they aim to show that Occitan at the very least can be a language of the present and future, not simply a dusty relic from a folkloric past.<sup>40</sup> The Fabulous Trobadors also juxtapose the French regional language and American consumer culture, when they sing a song about eating at McDonald's in Occitan: this 'old' language can be used to talk about the most 'modern' cultural practices.

There are several potential audiences for The Fabulous Trobadors' music. Elderly southern peasants, who may have once actively spoken a dialect of Occitan conceivably might figure in the audiences of some of the very local venues where this group plays throughout the southwest. Supporters of the Occitan regionalist movement might be attracted by the publicity given to the language they have been trying to 'save,' though some would surely find fault with it. Both of these groups would be more familiar with the non-mediatized music and it is not for this audience that the Fabulous Trobadors have signed on with Mercury. Their targeted audience has a broader base. Perhaps the primary target is younger people in the southern cities. Some of them may recognize phrases or words in Occitan heard from older relatives living in the countryside who actually speak a dialect of Occitan. Others have no connection to speakers of regional southern languages, but can connect with the language as a symbol of regional identity. This new form of regional identity is not attached to genealogical roots, but stands as an attachment to a place that even immigrant youth tap into. Both IAM and Zebda (whose sales far outstrip those of The Fabulous Trobadors and Massilia Sound System) emphasize their connections to Marseilles and Toulouse respectively and picture their cities on their CD covers.<sup>41</sup> As Mustapha Amokrane, one of the members of the Toulouse Franco-Maghribi group Zebda notes: 'On est un peu dans la recherche de l'identité ... Par

<sup>39</sup> This was also the title of a publication produced by the Toulouse Institute of Occitan Studies in the late 1970s. In a conscious move to elevate its sociolinguistic status, the brochure explained that Occitan was a language, not a patois. During fieldwork conducted by Mark in Languedoc and Gascony in the late 1970s and early 1980s, peasant native speakers often quoted this phrase, before saying that this 'new' language of the cities, Occitan, was far removed from the oral language of their rural working lives. They also said that they could not understand Occitan, nor read it.

<sup>40</sup> Another example of Sicre's remaking of traditional folklore is evidenced in his electronic rendering of the opening phrases of 'Se canto', an Occitan ballad about lovers separated by a Pyrenean mountain valley which is sung at local weddings or family celebrations in the southwest. Sicre introduces this regional identity marker via sampling, just prior to a song that celebrates Cachou throat lozenges, made in Toulouse.

<sup>41</sup> Sicre openly appeals to this last group, as when he asserts that Occitan is being learned all over Toulouse. The specific example takes place between songs 12 and 13 on *Era pas de faire*, Fabulous Trobadors CD (1992). Just prior to Sicre's satirical 'Come On Every Baudis', which mocked the RPR Toulousain mayor Dominique Baudis.

rapport au fait qu'on soit fils d'émigrés, évidemment le problème de l'identité s'est posé très tôt, à l'adolescence c'est des questions qui te sautent à la gueule. Qu'est-ce que je suis? Je suis algérien? Je suis français? Tu n'as pas vraiment envie de choisir, t'as envie de dire moi je suis de Toulouse, c'est une manière de dire je suis français encore plus forte.<sup>42</sup>

Another audience that the Fabulous Trobadors appeals to consists of those people outside of Occitania who have an attachment to local regional movements. The example of projecting a regional language out into the world is one that all minoritized cultures can appreciate. Finally, the music appeals to some people who have no connection whatsoever with either the language or the philosophy expressed in the songs. They simply like the sound of the music.

The fact that The Fabulous Trobadors' use of Occitan dropped down from 50 per cent of their first CD to 20 per cent of the second and to even less on the third CD suggests a conscious decision to develop a broader listener base and to distance themselves from earlier traditional folkloric productions in which regional languages dominated with respect to French. The decrease in use of the regional language may also be a function of who produced the CDs, as The Fabulous Trobadors' second and third CDs were picked up by Mercury. In the light of the CSA ruling that 40 per cent of the music on national radio stations must be in the French language, in order to stem the tide of English-language contemporary music, there may be some pressure from the producers to use French.<sup>43</sup>

The use of Occitan on the second CD appears primarily in the form of titles to songs, whose content is then exclusively French. This serves as a regional marker in the same way as using references to local foods and local neighbourhoods (common topics for both the Fabulous Trobadors and Massilia Sound System). Eating stands in for politics in one satirical song that questions the motives of all French politicians, running the gamut from Left to Right. The Occitan refrain used is 'qué volio minjar' ('what did he want to eat,' meaning to what kind of politics did each politician subscribe?). In another song, the title is the Occitan command form 'Beu' ('Drink!'), in a song that extolls the virtues of drinking red wine, even as it admits that drink cannot fully integrate all southerners, namely Muslims who do not consume alcohol.

<sup>42</sup> Interview de Hakim et Mustapha du Groupe ZEBDA. 'Motivé's les frangins'. <http://home.worldnet.fr/transmed/Zebda.html> (3 June 1999) 2. ZEBDA had the hit single of the summer of 1999. IAM had the hit single of the summer of 1994. Both groups have very close ties with the Fabulous Trobadors and Massilia Sound System. Zebda covered the Fabulous Trobador song, 'Come on Every Baudis' on their first recording and IAM's first recording was produced by Massilia Sound System's Rocker Productions.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of how the quota ruling affects minority language music: see D. McMurray, 'La France arabe', in A. Hargreaves and M. McKinney (eds), *Post-colonial Cultures in France* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 26–39.



Perhaps for old time's sake, The Fabulous Trobadors still occasionally set Occitan medieval texts to music, but more often, Occitan has a playful function in their songs. *Mots encadenats* (CD1) lists a series of words with shared prefixes while *Dins mon vilatge* (CD2) lists a series of medieval professions and a series of Occitan dialects. Phonological parallelism often takes precedence over semantic parallelism, or rhyme over reason, obfuscating boundaries between languages. No purism here, only a multilingual salad.

Links between Occitan and other Romance languages are highlighted in a kind of Pan-Southern/Mediterranean identity, placing regional languages and national languages on the same footing. In his multilingual New Year's greetings song, 'Bona annada' (CD2) Sicre throws together Lyonnais and Breton peoples; Yugoslavia and Bosnia; and Inuit culture. This message carries over to the third CD, when Sicre proposes lines in Polish, Esperanto, Xârâcûú, Swedish, Balinese, Brazilian Portuguese, Drehu, and Arabic as a preface to a song that promotes the spring Festival of Languages<sup>44</sup> sponsored by his cultural organization in the main square in central downtown Toulouse.

Multilingual reflexivity in song traditions reveals local ideologies about multilingualism and about the use of particular languages grounded in space and time. Multilingualism is not new to local traditions. What is different about the present historical juncture is the disconnection with place, the intensity of media sounds and images, and the possibility of communicating across great distances in very little time. It is somewhat ironic that, in these globalized times when the dominance of English in popular music is supreme, at the same time new possibilities exist for the global distribution of local languages embedded in local musical traditions. The decrease in the Fabulous Trobadors' use of Occitan over their three albums does not point to a successful case of language revival, but it does place Occitan side-by-side with all the other minoritized languages in France. The success of Occitan ethnorap lies more in changing attitudes towards French regional languages rather than in developing speakers of Occitan.

Sicre's music plays to multiple audiences then: to young people in France who do not know Occitan, whom he needs to reach in French (including the hip Parisian readers of *Libération* or *Les Inrockuptibles*); to Francophone audiences outside of France who equally do not know Occitan, and who lack the broader cultural context in which to frame French regional music; and to 'the people,' who include the community activists who frequent the *cafés*

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<sup>44</sup> This linguistic forum is sponsored by Sicre's own neighbourhood cultural centre. It has among its supporters the Institute of Occitan Studies, Occitan language schools, an Occitan library, named Mediterranean, and an Esperanto culture centre, according to the liner notes of the Fabulous Trobadors' 3rd CD, *On the Linha Imaginèt*. Mercury 558772 -2 (1998).

*philosophiques*, immigrant youth, shoppers at markets and regional public spaces, and the dispossessed French working-class, descendants of earlier migrations of Italians, Spanish, and Poles. This last group may be fully assimilated linguistically, but Sicre sees it as disenfranchised from cultural traditions and a clear sense of identity, and most vulnerable in the light of its precarious economic status. Raggamuffin music and poetry of the moment provide symbolic tools through which an economically dispossessed and culturally disinherited population can forge an identity and sense of community.

The Trobadors reinforce their message against centralization by the use of Occitan and languages other than French, even if these languages only appear as tokens. They use language in ways that are rich in parallelism, reflecting the importance of orality to non-dominant cultures. In both the languages that they use and the way in which they use them, the Fabulous Trobadors exemplify their oppositional stance to standard, monologic, official languages.

### Conclusion

As linguistic anthropologists interested in Gallo-Romance regional languages and knowing their marginalized histories, we were struck by how The Fabulous Trobadors crashed the gates of mainstream popular culture. This use of languages other than French is not uncommon in the recent history of French popular music. The Gypsy Kings sing commercials on French TV and Khaled's *rai-funk* song, 'Didi', hit the top ten as early as 1992, even though it is in Arabic. There are many other North African musicians who pepper their songs with Arabic, and rap musicians lean quite heavily on English vocabulary. However, the use of minority indigenous languages has been almost absent, with the exception of Breton, which has caught the wave of Celtic music popularity.

The Fabulous Trobadors have plunged into the hybrid world of global musical commodities, gripping tightly onto local specificities. The most obvious mark of this is the use of a regional language and references to local events, places and people, but The Fabulous Trobadors also present a clearly stated philosophy that privileges the local within a global context.<sup>45</sup> If many of their texts contain highly localized references and privilege the space of Toulouse, this may give listeners beyond southern France a sense of how they in turn might construct their own local identity. One result of global contexts of production has been an increased sensitivity to local

<sup>45</sup> See V. Mark, 'Cultural pastiches: intertextualities in the Moncrabeau Liars' Festival narratives', *Cultural Anthropology*, vi (2) (1991) 193-211, for a discussion of regional remakes of national history framed within global culture in southwestern France.

particularities of social life. As Appadurai noted, the locality (both in the sense of the local factory or site of production and in the extended sense of the nation-state) becomes a fetish which disguises the globally dispersed forces that actually drive the production process.<sup>46</sup> Studying the Fabulous Trobadors has alerted us to what Gilroy has called 'the difficult task of striving to comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions which suggest that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilizing flux of the post-contemporary world.'<sup>47</sup>

The issue of regional languages in France came to the fore during the summer of 1999 when President Jacques Chirac refused to support all of the articles of the European Charter of Regional Languages.<sup>48</sup> Politicians, academics, and people of all political tendencies entered an intense debate regarding the status of regional languages in France. On one side it was claimed that the charter contained clauses contrary to the French Constitution (in particular, Article 2, which states, 'la langue de la République est le français'). Thus in a decision passed 16 June 1999, the French Supreme Court ruled: 'Considérant qu'il résulte de ces dispositions combinées que la Charte européenne des langues régionales ou minoritaires, en ce qu'elle confère des droits spécifiques à des "groupes" de locuteurs de langues régionales ou minoritaires, à l'intérieur de "territoires" dans lesquels ces langues sont pratiquées, porte atteinte aux principes constitutionnels d'invisibilité de la République, d'égalité devant la loi et d'unicité du peuple français.'<sup>49</sup> Themes brought up in the debate included Vichy support for regional languages and the ethnic breakup of Yugoslavia, both of which were hotly contested by people on the other side of the debate.

The reaction of the French government lent credence to what the regionalist press had been proclaiming for decades: the hypercentralisation and cultural conformity of the French State. As countries throughout Europe move towards regional self-determination, France remains the second most

<sup>46</sup> A. Appadurai cited in T. Mitchell, *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop, and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 87.

<sup>47</sup> P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 101. This work illustrates elements of the debate between V. Erlmann, 'Call and response: a reply to Mark Slobin', *Ethnomusicology*, xxxvii (2) (Spring/Summer 1993) 263-9, and M. Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993) about the role of difference in the contemporary music scene.

<sup>48</sup> We would like to thank Matthieu Dalle and Hélène Gresso, graduate students in the Department of French at Penn State, for their document search of articles on the summer 1999 linguistic debates.

<sup>49</sup> J. Henley, 'The French tongue holds sway', *Guardian Weekly*, Issue 1-7 (July 1999) 6. The French-language quote comes from a web-site devoted to discussion of the Charter: <http://www.multimania.com/verdammi/forum.html>

centralized country.<sup>50</sup> Decentralization began in 1982–83, but French regions receive only 2 per cent of the state budget, as compared to the 50 per cent regions receive in certain other European states. In addition, regional advocates claim that the division of the country into regions was done in Paris, with little consideration given to the cultural identity of the people in these areas.<sup>51</sup>

The debates surrounding adoption of the European Charter of Regional Languages saw a battle between human rights and states' rights or, Democracy versus the Republic. Claude Sicre was not to be silent during this debate. On 13 July, he was interviewed along with the linguist, Henri Meschonnic in *Libération*. Sicre's first complaint concerned how the argument was laid out, in terms of regionalism and roots, when the real problem was how to promote cultural decentralization against the background of French cultural oligarchy. Regionalism is just another version of French nationalism, on the linguistic as well as cultural plane. Sicre accuses both regionalism and nationalism of killing languages by 'protecting' them. Here, he is referring to the various measures taken by the French government to ensure the continuation of a 'pure' French in the face of the onslaught of English.<sup>52</sup> Sicre is no purist. He cleverly reinterprets the history of the Occitan movement by saying that he is an *Occitaniste* because he is for cultural democracy in France. He goes on to say that today travel and new forms of media present a zone of freedom where people see that they can create something else. Or as Sicre says, 'Tout s'invente dans la culture occitane, c'est l'Amérique.'<sup>53</sup>

In addition to not wanting to 'protect' languages, Sicre also refuses to place a value on any language according to how many speakers it has. Xârâciú thus finds a place next to English in an egalitarian vision of the world's languages. A Breton sociologist followed a similar logic when he questioned the way in which the French government devalued the regional languages due to the small percentage of speakers within the borders of the hexagon and yet promoted French beyond its borders, when it is spoken by only 2 per cent of the world's population.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Second only to Greece, claims J.-J. Monnier, 'Vers l'Europe des régions', *Ar Men*, xcii, Mars (1998) 17.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>52</sup> Brulard outlines the various protectionist measures beginning with imposing the use of French in commerce and advertising in 1975 to the 1994 Toubon Law (I. Brulard, 'Linguistic policies', in S. Perry (ed.), *Aspects of Contemporary France* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> C. Sicre, and H. Meschonnic, 'Interview. La pluralité pour renforcer la Nation: la défense des langues de France implique celle des histoires de France. Une façon d'unifier la République, Henri Meschonnic et Claude Sicre', *Libération: Langues régionales: un chanteur occitan et un linguiste débattent ... Henri Meschonnic, professeur en linguistique, et Claude Sicre, membre des Fabulous Trobadors*, B. Vallaeys. <http://www.liberation.com/languesregio/actu/990713.htm> (13 July 1999) 4.

<sup>54</sup> R. Le Coadic, 'Les Bretons n'ont pas de leçons à recevoir', *Le Monde des débats*, Issue 6 (Septembre 1999) 17.