



## Constructing, Negotiating, and Performing Chicano Manhood as a Borderland Masculinity

Kostia Lennes

To cite this article: Kostia Lennes (2016): Constructing, Negotiating, and Performing Chicano Manhood as a Borderland Masculinity, Journal of Borderlands Studies, DOI: [10.1080/08865655.2016.1257364](https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2016.1257364)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2016.1257364>



Published online: 21 Dec 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## Constructing, Negotiating, and Performing Chicano Manhood as a Borderland Masculinity

Kostia Lennes

Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

### ABSTRACT

In this article, I focus on the construction, negotiation and performance of Chicano masculinity and, more specifically, on its connection with the US-Mexico borderland. Drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's work on the borderland, this article introduces the term "borderland masculinity" as a concept to characterize the embedment of borderland subjectivity (performed through mestizaje in Anzaldúa's approach) in Chicanos' masculine identity. To achieve this, I discuss and compare various articles that illustrate different ways of constructing, negotiating and performing what I have called the "borderland masculinity."

### Introduction

In the late 1980s, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) was one of the starting points for a wide range of studies interrogating identity construction through the lens of the borderland, understood both as a physical and symbolic entity. As a queer Chicana feminist, Anzaldúa conceptualized the "new *mestiza*" as a higher Chicano consciousness going beyond Western binary thinking of race, language, gender and sexuality among other social identities. In the wake of Anzaldúa's theory, numerous scholars (e.g. Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba 2002; Gaspar de Alba 2010) have placed particular emphasis on gender issues in the context of the US-Mexico borderland. From the significant expansion of the Anzaldúan scholarship to the more recent focus on femicides (Gaspar de Alba 2010; Staudt 2008a), the US-Mexico borderland probably remains the most extensively studied frontier when it comes to gender. Moreover, Chicana feminists have often pointed out how gender intersects with race/ethnicity and culture in the specific form of discrimination they suffer. However, it is striking how this gender focus has been put almost exclusively on women. Often drawing on the intersectional approach,<sup>1</sup> many of these Chicano/a scholars have articulated overlapping positions commonly attributed to the dominated, epitomizing Chicana women of color as paradigmatic victims of (white) hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Although the complex situation of these women needed to be further analyzed, the case of Chicano men navigating on the borderland has been widely neglected. Indeed, while so-called Chicano studies have undoubtedly taken into account

**CONTACT** Kostia Lennes ✉ k.lennes@hotmail.fr 📧 Erasmus Mundus Master MITRA, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology (research centre: IMMRC), Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Parkstraat 45, Leuven 3000, Belgium

© 2016 Association for Borderlands Studies

Chicano men as part of their focus on Chicano people, these were rarely considered as gendered subjects, unlike Chicana women.

Yet, some scholars (Broughton 2008; Datta et al. 2009; DeVargas and Donzelli 2014; Donaldson and Howson 2009; Haile and Siegmann 2014; Monsutti 2005; Montes 2013; Sinatti 2014; Vasquez del Aguila 2014) have highlighted how masculinities are shaped and challenged by border crossings and migration trajectories. A few of them (Broughton 2008; Cantú 2009; Carrillo and Fontdevila 2014) have focused on Mexican masculinities in a context of border crossing, and more specifically (Baca Zinn 1982; Barriga 2001; Holling 2006; Rivera 1997; Ramirez 2011; Staudt 2008b) on Chicano manhood. Thus, it has been argued that Chicanos' gender identity is widely hybridized and maintains a specific relationship with the borderland. In his analysis of Chicano masculinity, Rivera (1997, 35) pointed out that "the question of origin, or of remembering one's origins, lies at the center of Chicano identity and is often expressed as an alternate to both American and Mexican cultural identities." Furthermore, his analysis shows how Chicanos' cultural identity circulates around the border and is then part of a specific construction of masculinity.

This article explores the complex interrelationships between the US-Mexico borderland and Chicano men *as men*. Drawing on various essays and ethnographic works providing some insight on this matter, I propose to establish the preliminary basis of what would be the study of Chicano masculinity *on* and *as* borderlands. Throughout the analysis, I describe the conflicts around the construction, negotiation and performance of Chicano masculinity. Even though it is clear that Chicano men embrace different models of masculinity,<sup>2</sup> it is reasonable to believe that many of them actually negotiate their masculine identity precisely on the in-betweenness of the borderland, this non-existing and artificial territory, which is both spatial and symbolic.

In this paper, I argue that, in many respects, Chicano male identity could be understood as a "borderland masculinity." My aim is thus to highlight how the US-Mexico borderland somehow roots itself in Chicanos' hybrid gender identity. Far from being a simple *mestizaje* between the US and the Mexican paradigmatic cultural models, the article emphasizes the complexity and the elasticity of what I have called the "borderland masculinity." It shows how Chicano men negotiate their masculine identity by using various strategies that all, in a way, deal with the borderland. My objective is thus to demonstrate that inhabiting the US-Mexico borderland and being a "borderland subject" (Kynčlová 2014) constitute "engendered practices" (Broughton 2008) for men too. Consequently, without undermining the great relevance and necessity of previous works on Chicana women, the paper offers an analysis of gender identification on the US-Mexico borderland through the lens of masculinities. I argue that we can consider the intersecting identities of Chicano men as well in order to grasp how they think of themselves *as men* and how these identity constructions refer to different positions of power. Finally, the concept of "borderland masculinity" will—I hope—enable us to further understand the complexity of being a man in a border culture. To achieve this, I discuss some important concepts (in particular from Anzaldúa's thinking) at the nexus of gender and borderlands. These insights lead me to propose and define the term "borderland masculinity" that I further illustrate and describe through two ethnographic works: the "unhomely masculinity" and the "Brown masculinity."

## Theoretical Framework

As this work is literature-based, I define in this section the main concepts I employ and the theoretical framework this paper refers to.

### *Men, Masculinities and Identities*

Surprisingly, the overall disinterest for the study of men and masculinities in general has its roots in gender studies themselves. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gender studies have widely focused on women and feminism, and a little later on gay and lesbian issues. Gender theorists have concentrated their criticism against the patriarchal system, but very few have studied this system from “the inside.” It is only in the 1990s that social scientists have started to theorize the study of men and masculinities. Connell’s influential work (*Masculinities*, 1995) played a major role in the institutionalization of this sub-field. Finally, men were considered in their singularity, as gendered subjects, and not simply as the universal norm (Fassin 2014). Likewise, other theorists have reversed the same logic, for instance, by conceptualizing heterosexuality or whiteness as specific objects of study. Approaching the hegemonic norm as one has approached the margins is of primary importance in order to grasp gender relations in their global complexity. Excluding men from gender studies would lead us to believe their bodies, attitudes and behaviors to be natural and, therefore, irrelevant as topics of study. On the contrary, Connell’s approach underlines masculinities’ multidimensionality and asserts that hegemonic norms are socially constructed as well.

Therefore, discussing Chicano masculinity is first and foremost an examination of identity. Even though it may seem essentializing at first sight, the expression “Chicano masculinity” refers to the multiple ways Chicano men think of themselves *as men*, in other words, how they conceptualize themselves as gendered subjects. Regarding masculinities and border identities in particular, as mentioned above, very little attention had been paid to Chicano men *as men* through the lens of border crossings. In the literature on the US-Mexico borderland, males are often depicted as dominant, using violence against vulnerable working-class women. The image of the Latin American macho is quite discussed as well in numerous works (Anzaldúa 1987; Gutmann 1996, 2003; Staudt 2008a). Again, although this perspective is not necessarily wrong, men inhabiting the borderland should not be restricted to this simplistic understanding of hegemonic masculinity. This is why this article proposes to articulate the various meanings associated with “masculinity” and the identification processes at stake on the borderlands.

### *Borderlands and the Question of Cultural Hybridity*

In this article, the US-Mexico borderland obviously refers to a geographical zone surrounding a national border, a spatial and legal line of separation. Thus, in this case, the notion of borderland has a physical reality that is embodied, for instance, by the border wall separating Mexico and the US, the Rio Grande or the border patrols. However, my focus on gender relations and ethnic boundaries will automatically lead me to deal with conceptual and symbolic borders as well. Furthermore, as some authors (Anzaldúa 1987; Delgado 2000) argued, spatial and conceptual borders are sometimes one single entity, marking a social frontier and a literal separation at the same time. As will be demonstrated throughout the analysis, the

US-Mexico borderland, in many regards, is a physical border that intrinsically represents, embodies and reproduces social, gender and ethnic boundaries.

Furthermore, the notion of “borderland identity” is one of the starting points of my argument. In this regard, Prokkola (2009, 22) wrote that, “as institutions, state borders embody social norms and values which more or less become extended into the mindscapes and identity narratives of people.” It is precisely around this understanding of the borderland that I have carried out this research. In the present context, the borderland identity can then be considered as one way—among others—to position oneself beyond the two cultural paradigms exemplified by Mexico and the US. However, as Vila argued (2003) in his critical article on social identities on the US-Mexico borderland, the “metaphor of the third country” (2003, 608) does not always capture the experiences and the trajectories of the borderland inhabitants. Vila questions the tendency of certain Chicano/a scholars (Anzaldúa 1987; Rosaldo 1989) to ignore the processes reinforcing preexisting borders or even establishing new boundaries. As I will further explain later on, the notion of “borderland masculinity” presented in this paper does not exclude any of these conceptions.

### **Chicanos/as**

Finally, I will refer to Chicanos and Chicanas throughout this article. The latter term remains quite undefined as some scholars refer to Chicano people to designate Mexican-Americans (dual citizenship) whereas some others also include all the Mexicans who embody, to some extent, this hybrid identity that is performed, for instance, by speaking a specific form of language (such as Spanglish), maintaining particular cultural practices or consciously belonging to a certain community. Here, my understanding of Chicanos/as, and in particular of Chicano men, is principally cultural. Whether they live on the Mexican side or on the American side, whether they inhabit the spatial borderland or they “carry” it with them elsewhere, whether they are American citizens or undocumented migrants, all the Chicanos I will refer to embody, to various extents, this hybrid identity, what is often called the Chicano culture. Furthermore, the articles and book chapters I will analyze in this study all mention the term Chicano to refer to the population they focus on, even though these groups might seem quite different as I will underline later on. Concerning Chicanos/as’ studies in particular, numerous Chicano/a scholars and authors, in the wake of Anzaldúa’s work (1987), have focused on this community, especially on issues of discrimination, ethnicity, cultural authenticity and feminism.

### **From Borderland Identity to “Borderland Masculinity”**

As mentioned above, one of my aims is to demonstrate to what extent the concept of “borderland masculinity” could be relevant to grasp Chicano men’s condition. I will thus recall and discuss the original theory on borderland identity, and then specify what leads me to extend it to the notion of “borderland masculinity.”

### **Borderland and Border Identities**

Borderland identities now represent a significant topic within border studies. In her famous book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Anzaldúa introduced the concept

of “new *mestiza*” to characterize Chicanos/as’ specific borderland identity. In this semi-autobiographical work, Anzaldúa seriously criticizes the border ideology and its implications. Her philosophy of the border precisely articulates its physical dimension (the spatial separation) and its symbolic and mental realities (gender, sex, race and class boundaries). Therefore, Anzaldúa’s interpretation of the US-Mexico borderland is intrinsic to the queer theory she has herself contributed to. She portrays the border in general as a product of the Western thought aimed at creating and/or highlighting differences. According to her, the border is an American ideology that legitimizes traditional Western binary oppositions. This dualism does not fit with the Mexican reality, in particular with the Chicanos/as living on the US-Mexico borderland. In this respect, Kynčlová (2014, 2) compares Anzaldúa’s understanding of the border to Bhabha’s concept of “in-between spaces” (1994). Kynčlová (2014, 2) argues that “it is these grey zones [the borderlands] that attract attention as they are spaces where meanings and identities are constantly in the process of negotiation, becoming, and struggle for recognition.” It is precisely this insight that leads Anzaldúa (1987, 25–26) to critique—though in a much more virulent way—not only the border ideology in general as I mentioned, but the US-Mexico borderland regime in particular:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants ... Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens – whether they possess documents or not, whether they’re Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot ... Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus.

Then, the Chicano borderland identity could be seen as this specific culture embodied by the borderland inhabitants—the Chicanos/as—whose condition is subjected to the borderland regime and authority. In other words, the borderland identity must be understood here as a set of intersecting identities that some Chicanos/as embody in a specific way. Their homeland is the borderland itself, that is, a hybridized and still undefined territory. Furthermore, Anzaldúa’s work—that is often understood and analyzed as a literary piece of work—has a collective dimension. Indeed, she talks about her literature as a “cultural representation.” According to Kynčlová (2006, 44), “the experience Anzaldúa portrays can thus be understood as both a representative of Anzaldúa’s autobiography as an individual and at the same time as a representative of the universal story of the Chicano people.” This insight might give greater prominence to the use of these concepts—borderland identity and *mestiza* consciousness—in the following analysis.

### ***Borderland Subjectivity and “Glocal Gender Regime”***

Anzaldúa’s critique of the borderland is also very much related to the notion of *mestizaje* —“the art of living on the border” —or *mestiza* consciousness, in other words what has been called “borderland subjectivity” (Kynčlová 2014). Anzaldúa (1987, 102–103) wrote:

As a *Mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless

because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective tired because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. *Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting, and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.

Chicanos/as are then borderland subjects in the sense that they are literally dominated and restricted by the borderland's norms, both social rules (customs and usual rules one has to respect) and legal rules (the American regulation of the border materialized by checkpoints, for instance). Ashcroft (2009, 20) defines the borderland subjectivity as the "in-betweenness that goes beyond the reifying effects of national identity." This perspective somehow reflects Anzaldúa's viewpoint as it challenges the idea of two well-distinguished nations. Instead, Anzaldúa, as many other Chicano/a activists, advocates for what she sees as an indivisible whole, a consistent and hybrid territory. In this respect, Kynčlová (2014, 2) also corroborates this view in evocating the borderland subjectivity as "the ability to navigate in/between/among/within different cultures, languages, and epistemological systems, and to embody this hybridity consciously and constructively with respect to one's own racial/ethnic background, gender identity, class belonging, and reflected lived experience." Again, the idea of a collective consciousness of Chicanos/as' shared identity is of primary importance. Then, the borderland subjectivity—or the *mestiza* consciousness in Anzaldúa's words—is precisely what allows us to mobilize the borderland identity as a constructive and political (in the widest sense of the word) distinctiveness.

Furthermore, borderland subjects are intrinsically compelled by what I call, drawing on Voicu's article (2014), "borderland glocal gender regime." Voicu (2014) argues that hybrid cultures (such as the Chicano culture) often influence the nexus of local and global gender regimes, thus producing complex intersecting identities. Consequently, I use the term "borderland glocal gender regime" to refer to the expansion of what could be viewed, at first sight, as solely local or regional gender norms. Instead, I would argue that the borderland gender regime is not only at work on the borderland as a geographical area, but also on a more global scale where it is somehow displaced and reproduced, all the while mixing with other influences (mostly American but not only). Indeed, Chicanos/as "carry" the borderland culture and identity with them and, consequently, continue to perform many of its tenets, including its gender regime. Then, what already appears as a hybridized gender identity is further influenced and reshaped when Chicanos/as have to adapt to new configurations and new locations. I will further discuss this insight when examining the case of "Brown masculinity" later on.

Hence, though they do not write about gender in the same way, this remains probably one of the most important insights in many Chicano/a authors' works, and this is what leads me to suggest the notion of "borderland masculinity" that I attempt to define below.

### **"Borderland Masculinity"**

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) is too often understood as a simplistic manifesto for Chicana feminism that denounces Chicanos' *machismo* and takes a stand for vulnerable working-class women. Though this viewpoint is not necessarily wrong, I argue that Anzaldúa's approach has more complex implications for Chicano masculinities.



Indeed, she points out the violent domination of white hegemonic masculinity (embodied by Americans inhabiting the borderland) over Chicanos' marginalized (see Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), colonized (see Baca Zinn 1982) and racialized (see Lopez 2011; Pascoe 2007) masculinity, which is legitimized by the legal border. This hierarchy between masculinities is then part of the borderland subjectivity that Anzaldúa conceptualizes as *mestiza* consciousness. For instance, she tells a story of rape in one of the poems that is part of *Borderland/La Frontera* (1987). Kynčlová (2014, 5) analyses this poem (*We Call Them Greasers*) as follows:

The poem narrates an incident in which a husband is forced to watch the spectacle of his wife's brutal rape and murder executed by a White Anglo. Because the Chicano husband ... is tied to a mesquite tree ... he is deprived of any sort of agency and is made to be passive, powerless onlooker of his wife's doom, and the subject of victimization carried out by a man who not only represents the colonizer's political, economic, and cultural domination, but also embodies hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt).

In Anzaldúa's terms, hegemonic masculinity (embodied by the *White Anglo* in the previous example) implies an incredible violence that is not only symbolic, economic or political, but also physical. In this respect, as it has been suggested (Baca Zinn 1982; Kynčlová 2014), Chicanos would perform *machismo* precisely in response to the American domination I have just pointed out. *Machismo* has been described (Gutmann 1996) as a "cult of exaggerated masculinity," a set of hyper-masculine attitudes and, in particular, the dominance towards women. This feature is often assigned to Latin American males but the term has its roots in Mexico and is widely used to refer to Chicano men. Thus, according to some scholars (Baca Zinn 1982; Kynčlová 2014), Chicanos perform *machismo* to resist racial oppression. *Machismo* is thus understood as an "adaptive characteristic" (Baca Zinn 1982, 30), in other words the displacement from a specific form of domination (White hegemonic masculinity) to another form of domination (misogyny, gender discrimination, homophobia, etc.). In other words, Chicano men would incorporate American supremacy and then perform *machismo* as a means to defend their "injured" masculine identity. As Kynčlová (2014, 5) states, "masculine aggression may mask internal weakness and/or lack of status."

Finally, these insights lead me to propose the notion of "borderland masculinity." I use this concept to characterize the embedment of borderland subjectivity (*mestizaje*) in Chicanos' masculine identity. However, my purpose is obviously not to argue that all Chicanos perform "borderland masculinities," but rather to highlight the specific context—that is, the borderland gender regime—in which many of them construct their gender identity. To achieve this, I discuss below various ethnographic examples that illustrate different ways of constructing and performing what I have called the "borderland masculinity."

### **"Unhomely Masculinities:" Negotiating Hegemony at School**

Drawing on Bhabha's concept of unhomely (1994), Carrillo (2013) examines the case of Mexican-origin scholarship boys studying in American universities surrounding the US-Mexico borderland. He argues that these working-class men embody "unhomely masculinities" (2013, 203) to counter American White hegemonic masculinity that is performed, for instance, through rituals, fraternities and college football games (2013, 199).



Carrillo understands the “unhomely” as the “nature of being an insider-outsider that provides a continuous sense of ambiguity and resistance” (2013, 198).

### *Insider-outsider*

These Chicano men are indeed in an ambivalent position: they are migrant students who have the opportunity to study in American universities but they do not respond to Western expectations of “scholarly manhood.” To resist this oppression, the scholarship boys construct their masculinity according to their “unhomeliness:” they keep “organic” ties to the past (by committing to the hometown) and refuse integration that they perceive as an Americanization process. Carrillo (2013, 199) tells the story of one of his interviewees as follows:

Mario engages an ongoing set of discursive masculinities that do not conform to White, male, middle to upper-middle class norms and cultural productions of scholarly manhood. Also, he refused to join fraternities, consume *frapuchinos*, engage in coffee shop culture, and he left a college football game after he saw that many White students were singing the songs from his university in unison. That scared him – the rituals, the codes, and the way the university expected his contribution to a university student ethos of collective consciousness. Mario does not feel power in this context. Historically, White hegemonic masculinities have centered their norms within university culture. Mario knows this and rejects many of these tenets. So for Mario, his masculinity connects to a sense of power within his embrace of the ‘ghetto’.

Their “unhomely masculinity” is then a hybrid gender identity that is subordinated and marginalized on both sides of the border. In this regard, their feelings widely corroborate Anzaldúa’s thought regarding the fact that she is disclaimed both by her “own people” and by the *White Anglos*. This comparison is actually quite revealing. Indeed, at first sight, the Mexican-origin scholarship boys do not have much in common with Anzaldúa and the Chicana feminists in general. They are not from the same generation, they do not share the same gender identity and their life trajectories remain quite dissimilar. However, the way they describe their feelings demonstrates that many of these Chicanos/as, despite their different situations, have to face ambivalent situations in which they are forced to negotiate their gender identity (as a lesbian and queer feminist for Anzaldúa, as “unhomely” men for the scholarship boys). Indeed, these Chicano men do not conform to expected norms of masculinity in the US nor to the working-class culture they come from in northern Mexico, on the other side of the border. They are then “trapped” between their education level—and the expectations it generates in terms of gendered performances—and their “original” cultural belonging that they refuse to forsake.

### *“Unhomely Masculinities:” Adapting Mestizaje*

Consequently, these Chicano students adopt alternative strategies in which their construction of gender identity plays an important role. Indeed, Carrillo (2013, 194) illustrates “the specific ways in which working-class Latino masculinities produce culturally situated notions of academic/intellectual manhood.” This is precisely what Carrillo calls “unhomely masculinities.” To achieve the production of a specific status of “educated Chicano man,” the scholarship boys have to deal with both gender and class issues.

Indeed, on the one hand, as Willis (1977) argued, working-class students generally perceive mental labor as a feminine task that “real men” should not fulfill. On the other hand, studying is widely seen as a middle-class and elite occupation. Yet, Chicanos consciously identify themselves as working-class or underclass “lads” (I will further discuss this insight in the next section), which automatically leads them to reject schooling in general. For these reasons, Chicano students are compelled to imagine their own way of being a well-educated colored man from a working-class background. In this sense, the concept of “unhomely masculinity” introduced by Carrillo constitutes the very performance of *mestizaje*, the borderland subjectivity, as I have discussed it previously. “Unhomely masculinities” must therefore be understood as one of the direct consequences of cultural hybridity on gender identification.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the “unhomely masculinity” is not only a response to defend oneself against White hegemonic masculinity. It is also a way to show Chicano students’ negative attitudes toward what they see as a privileged masculinity. Carrillo (2013, 200) explains these feelings as follows:

Mario associates White, privileged manhood, as always looking to the future and seeking individual gain. As such, to be a good man and a good student, he is supposed to silence his nostalgia, get good grades, get a “good career” and move beyond his barrio ethos. Mario is committed to not being controlled or becoming a learned man on “White terms.” Mario has to negotiate various layers about who he is, what the institutions were about, and what his role is within their graduate programs.

This excerpt shows that the main reason why Chicanos reject American masculinity—or at least the way its ideals are performed at university—is probably because of its liberal values (e.g. “individual gain,” “good career”). They refuse this identification and assume their need to express nostalgia and ambivalent feelings, which strongly counters both Mexican and American masculine attributes. In this respect, Montes (2013) has highlighted how emotions play a significant role in the construction of Latino migrants’ masculinity. Thus, manifesting feelings such as sadness and nostalgia must be understood as a way of distancing oneself both from Chicano working-class masculinity and from integration ideals prevailing in the host country. In this sense, these Mexican-origin students have certainly achieved the making of a specific masculine identity that has become their own. Finally, what is also interesting in this case is that the Chicano scholarship boys could instead adopt dominant White discourses and distance themselves from Mexican working-class culture. However, they made the opposite choice in confronting their Chicano identity— and thus their “unhomely masculinity” as a strategy—to American masculinity. I would argue that this could be understood as an evidence of the embedment of hybridity in Chicanos’ subversive ethos.

### ***Negotiating Masculinity and Space All at Once***

Finally, this example also shows how the US-Mexico borderland has become embedded in the ways gender identities are constantly negotiated on both sides of the border. Thus, the segmentation and the organization of space largely reflect and symbolize these ambivalent feelings. As one of the excerpts cited above illustrates, space and gender identities are challenged and negotiated at the same time, through a single process in which tensions and confrontations oppose individuals. For instance, the informant cited above (Mario) told

that he tends to avoid specific places (such as coffee shops) or specific configurations (such as football games) in order not to encounter performances of White hegemonic masculinity that could make him uncomfortable. These two hierarchized masculine identities are then irreconcilable in the same environment. Furthermore, as it is suggested in Carrillo's article (2013)—and in numerous studies on masculinities in school environments (Nespor 2000; Pascoe 2007, and others)—American universities are probably the very ground on which masculinities are confronted, challenged, shaped or reshaped and, ultimately, confirmed and asserted. In this respect, Nespor (2000) has conceptualized what he calls “topologies of masculinity” or “gendered spatialities,” in other words, how different masculinities become gradually bounded and spatially segregated in school contexts.

### Performing “Brown Masculinity”

In this final section, I discuss the notion of “Brown masculinity” as it is performed in Chicano rap music. Based on a study of Chicano rapper Kid Frost, Delgado (2000) analyzes the social construction of “Brown masculinity” and its relation to the US-Mexico borderland.

### Displacing the Borderland

This case study especially reveals how the US-Mexico borderland (and its “glocal gender regime,” as I have tried to define it previously) is reproduced outside the spatial borderland. In this case, East Los Angeles represents a kind of displacement of the original US-Mexico borderland toward a new local configuration. Though Kid Frost and its audience (mostly Chicanos/as living in the US) do not live on the borderland, they recreate and “replay”—to a different extent and through new local and global influences—borderland's original boundaries. Likewise, in his analysis of Kid Frost's music, Salvidar (1997, 126) underlines that Chicano rappers living in the US tend to perform a political discourse of resistance that is based on “a variety of *mestizo/a* identifications and social relations not yet permissible in the urban US-Mexico *frontera*.” This statement precisely illustrates the “glocality” of the borderland gender regime. In Los Angeles, Chicanos are released from the borderland's norms and customs; they are not required to reproduce any of its tenets anymore. Yet, Salvidar's assertion successfully highlights the process of displacement I am trying to analyze here. Despite their relative freedom<sup>3</sup> in California, Chicano men intentionally renew and reinvent their performances of *mestizaje*. Thus, they are still borderland subjects but their manifestations and attitudes are a testimony of the shift from a local borderland subjectivity (of those living on the US-Mexico borderland) to a global—or “glocal”—borderland identity (of those living in California). In this sense, the displacement of borderland identity functions as what might be called the “hybridization of hybridity.” Obviously, this shift has concrete implications on the negotiation of Chicanos' masculinity, and more specifically on its performances.

Focusing particularly on Chicanos' masculinity, Delgado (2000, 389) argues that “Brown masculinity occupies a unique position in the US-Mexico transnational space. The two national-cultural histories each do not adequately capture the experience and identity of Chicano males.” Furthermore, Kid Frost and many of the Chicanos living in Los Angeles are assigned to this Brown identity as a racialized masculinity that does

not fit in the historic racial dichotomy in the US (Black/White). Then, there are multiple borders intersecting all at once in this specific configuration, yet all interconnected to various extent. Delgado (2000, 389) explains this complex relationship as follows:

In the U.S. Latino brownness fits somewhere between the traditional, and overly simplistic, continuum of black and white. Chicanos (Mexican Americans) often find themselves politically and economically segregated from mainstream American society. Going beyond the racialized continuum, Chicanos find themselves positioned along another site: the border. In this position there are constant material and symbolic reminders of Chicanos' cultural hybridity. They are not quite the right fit on either side of the border.

Chicanos' Brown masculinity is thus located precisely on that in-betweenness embodied by the borderland, which is both a symbolic and a physical space of confrontation. In this respect, Delgado's understanding of "Brown masculinity" largely reflects the notion of "borderland masculinity" that I have attempted to define previously. Again, Chicano men are confronted to their hybrid ethos in its most injurious form: ambivalence and marginalization.

### *Performances and Authenticity of Chicano Masculinity*

Concerning performances in particular, Kid Frost performs "Brown masculinity" through his music by criticizing the institutions (the state and its representatives such as the police), looking for an authentic Chicano identity (e.g. lowrider culture) and celebrating East Los Angeles as Chicanos' recovered territory. Delgado also emphasizes the importance of *macho* behaviors that he sees as a way of countering American domination and the Western propensity for gender equality.<sup>4</sup> Overall, performing "Brown masculinity" and, more generally Brown identity, essentially means recovering and asserting Chicano culture in its most authentic and "purest" form. But, more importantly, Delgado (2000, 394) argues that both lyrics and performances ("styles") of Brownness tend to define Chicano masculinity at the intersection of hyper-masculinity (*machismo*) and underclass (*gangster*) culture. This means that rebellion is intrinsically part of "Brown masculinity." Violence, then, has to be performed—through music as well as through other ways—in order to be an accomplished Chicano man. In this regard, Delgado (2000, 395) claims:

We cannot overlook, however, the fact that Kid Frost's lyrical narratives do direct us to see how violence intertwines itself with the Chicano body and *macho* identity. The Chicano male is located within a bordered and policed environment that incubates anger, marginalization, violence, and virulent strains of *machismo* ... Kid Frost, like any good gangster rapper, imposes himself on others through his ability to physically dominate and his ability to lyrically dismantle ... Kid Frost performs a deconstruction of the forms of power and identity allocated to Chicano males in East Los Angeles. The game, such as it is, is relayed in lyrics that clearly allow Kid Frost to metaphorically perform his role as predator in search of prey – other rappers, gang bangers, women, the weak.

The performance of a supposed authentic Chicano masculinity through Hip Hop is quite revealing of the borderland's "glocality" I have just discussed. Drawing on a linguistic anthropology of globalization, Alim (2009) has underlined the role of youth in theorizing popular culture and subaltern identities through Hip Hop music. He argues that these young performers gain agency through the use of "translocal styles" that are at the

intersection of local and global influences. One of the common features raised by Alim is the “style of language” rather than the language itself. Though they sing in various languages depending on their localities, young performers generally play with languages in the same way. For instance, Kid Frost (as most Chicano rappers) sings in English, Spanish and *Calo*, a typically Chicano street slang (Kelly 1993, 73). This “style” is also used as a means to resist subordination and as a system of distinction. In introducing a specific “style” of Chicano Hip Hop, these performers contribute to create both a local identity and a local status in a host society that strongly reject them. Thus, the assumed “purity” and uniqueness of Chicano identity—and more specifically “Brown masculinity”—is part of a social construct (achieved through music and “style” in this case), which aims to surpass all the traditional boundaries that have always jeopardized Chicanos’ agency in all areas. According to Delgado (2000, 396), “it is this empowered, political valence of brownness that encourages Kid Frost to transcend the limitations of his hyper-masculinity, predatory identity.” In asserting and performing their “Brown masculinity,” Mexican-Americans deliberately identify themselves to a specific racialized masculinity that is slowly emerging among Blacks and Whites, the traditionally opposed communities in the US.

In sum, Delgado’s conceptualization of “Brown masculinity” widely mirrors the notion of “borderland masculinity” that I have introduced in this article. Indeed, the example of Chicano rap demonstrates how cultural performance of “Brown masculinity” can “alter the meaning of the borderlands while struggling to establish identity, community and a sense of place” (2000, 399). Undoubtedly, Chicanos’ performance of Brownness must be understood as an advocacy to be “at home on the border.” Finally, I would argue that Kid Frost’s case is not just the one of an isolated performer, but rather constitutes a representative illustration of Chicano masculine identity—and therefore of “borderland identity”—as it is commonly performed by other Chicano artists.

### Conclusion: Understanding “Borderland Masculinity” as an Elastic Concept

Throughout this essay, I have highlighted to what extent the concept of “borderland masculinity” could be relevant to grasp Chicano men’s condition. Drawing on the literature focusing on this issue, I have discussed and compared three main perspectives regarding Chicano masculinity and its relationship with the borderland, both as a physical and symbolic space of confrontation. Firstly, I have examined the implications of Anzaldúa’s notions of (1) *borderland identity* and *mestizaje* for Chicano masculinity. As I have argued, the borderland gender regime also threatens Chicano men. Though they are perhaps less exposed to physical violence than their female counterparts, Chicanos are however subject to symbolic violence (in Bourdieu’s sense). From this insight, I have proposed the concept of “borderland masculinity” that characterizes the embedment of borderland subjectivity in Chicano masculine identity. I have then discussed an ethnographic study, introducing the term (2) “*unhomely masculinity*,” that refers to the strategy adopted by Mexican-origin scholarship boys to resist American “scholarly manhood.” I have demonstrated that this response to hegemony is essentially constructed around ambivalent feelings that constantly deal with the borderland. Finally, I have focused on the cultural performance of (3) “*Brown masculinity*” and the redefinition of borderland identity through “glocal” influences. I have argued that the quest for an authentic “Brown masculinity” largely draws on the displacement of the US-Mexico borderland.

These latter two perspectives (“*unhomely masculinity*” and “*Brown masculinity*”) have in common the use of borderland identity as a means to counter American hegemony. However, they achieve this in a radically different way. While Chicano students confess their nostalgia, discomfort and ambivalent feelings, Chicano rappers, conversely, assert the purity and the distinctiveness of their gender identity that strongly opposes itself to American ideals. This comparison enables me to argue that what I have called the “borderland masculinity” in no case is a fixed category of masculinity, but rather a constantly negotiable gender identity, subject to changes and reinterpretations. Thus, if many Chicano males experience the trauma of the border and “carry” it with them, they do not manifest it in a univocal way. Furthermore, the “borderland masculinity” could be considered as a concept that goes beyond the opposition between the “hybridity theory” (Anzaldúa 1987; Rosaldo 1989) and the more nuanced view (Vila 2003), which have earlier been mentioned. Indeed, as an elastic—and somehow elusive—concept, the “borderland masculinity” does not capture one single masculine identity. Instead, it must be appreciated as a broad approach allowing a better understanding of the complex strategies used by Chicano men to negotiate their identity on the borderlands. Again, as the examples discussed above illustrate, Chicanos do not always think of themselves as products of hybridity, nor as border reinforcers. They often maneuver, with ambiguity and uncertainty, between all these paradigms. Finally, the elastic nature of the “borderland masculinity”—and the various ways it is performed by “borderland men”—could be further investigated in today’s global context.

What is also striking in Chicano men’s situation is that their “borderland masculinity” could be seen as what Le Renard (2014) has called “cosmopolitan masculinity.” The latter concept applies to men who have gained knowledge, familiarity and openness to other cultures and, therefore, who embody a masculine identity that is flexible and subject to “glocal” influences. For instance, the scholarship boys could be cosmopolitan men who use their multiple abilities (e.g. languages, education, networks, knowledge of both countries, etc.) to improve their career and trajectory. But, instead, they remain marginalized because of their cultural hybridity that impacts all areas, including gender identity. This insight leads me to rethink the applicability of intersectionality in the social sciences. I would argue that this concept could be relevant to grasp Chicano men’s situation. Indeed, though intersectionality was first used to refer to racialized women, in particular African-American women (Crenshaw 1989), the various cases discussed in the analysis demonstrate that Chicano males have to face complex systems of domination in which race (Chicanos’ brownness), class (their working-class background), nationality (their Mexican citizenship) and gender identity (their “borderland masculinity”) intersect.

## Endnotes

1. Introduced by Crenshaw (1989), the concept of intersectionality aims to study interrelated systems of oppression based on race/ethnicity, class, nationality, gender, sexuality and other axes of social identity that may be subject to discrimination. In this framework, numerous scholars (including Chicana feminists such as Anzaldúa and Moraga) have studied migrant women of color crossing the US-Mexico borderland.
2. See Connell’s theory (1995) about the four different masculinities (hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, subordinated masculinity and marginalized masculinity) and the different positions of power associated with them.



3. Chicanos living in the US are still victims of numerous discriminations in all domains (employment, culture, political life, housing, etc.).
4. This largely corroborates Kynčlová's (2014) viewpoint about the displacement of domination that I mentioned previously.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## References

- Alim, H. Samy. 2009. Translocal Style Communities: Hip Hop Youth as Cultural Theorists of Style, Language and Globalization. *Pragmatics* 19, no. 1: 103–27.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Ashcroft, Bill. 2009. Chicano Transnation. In *Imagined Transnationalism: U.S. Latino/a Literature, Culture, and Identity*, ed. Lomeli Concannon and Priewe, 13–28. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Baca Zinn, Maxine. 1982. Chicano Men and Masculinities. *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 10, no. 2: 29–44.
- Barriga, Miguel Díaz. 2001. Vergüenza and Changing Chicano and Chicana Narratives. *Men and Masculinities*, 3, no. 3: 278–98.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Broughton, Chad. 2008. Migration as Engendered Practice: Mexican Men, Masculinity and Northward Migration. *Gender and Society* 22, no. 5: 568–89.
- Cantú, Lionel. 2009. *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men*. New York: New York University Press.
- Carrillo, Hector, and Jorge Fontdevila. 2014. Border Crossings and Shifting Sexualities among Mexican Gay Immigrant Men: Beyond Monolithic Conceptions. *Sexualities*. 17, no. 8: 919–38.
- Carrillo, Juan F. 2013. The Unhomely in Academic Success: Latino Males Navigating the Ghetto Nerd Borderlands. *Culture, Society and Masculinities*, 5, no. 2: 193–207.
- Castillo, Debra A., and María-Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba. 2002. *Border Women: Writing from la Frontera*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Connell, Raewyn. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Connell, Raewyn, and James Messerschmidt. 2005. Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society*, 19, no. 6: 829–59.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989:139–67.
- Datta, Kavita, Cathy MacIlwaine, Joanna Herbert, Yara Evans, Jon May, and Jane Wills. 2009. Men on the Move: Narratives of Migration and Work Among Low-paid Migrant Men in London. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 10, no. 8: 853–73.
- Delgado, Fernando. 2000. All Along the Border: Kid Frost and the Performance of Brown Masculinity. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 20, no. 4: 388–401.
- DeVargas, Maria, and Stefania Donzelli. 2014. Sub-Saharan Migrants' Masculinities: An Intersectional Analysis of Media Representation during the Libyan War 2011. *Gender, Migration and Social Justice*. Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace, 9, no. 9: 241–63.
- Donaldson, M. and R. Howson. 2009. Men, Migration and Hegemonic Masculinity. In *Migrant Men: Critical Studies of Masculinities and the Migration Experience*, ed. M. Donaldson, R. Hibbins, R. Howson, and B. Pease, 210–17. London: Routledge.
- Fassin, Éric. 2014. Postface. In *Masculinités: Enjeux Sociaux de l'Hégémonie* [Masculinities: the Social Issues of Hegemony], ed. Raewyn Connell. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam.



- Gaspar de Alba, Alicia, ed. 2010. *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Gutmann, Matthew. 1996. *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gutmann, Matthew, ed. 2003. *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Haile, Aster Georgo, and Karin Astrid Siegmann. 2014. Masculinity at Work: Intersectionality and Identity Constructions of Migrant Domestic Workers in the Netherlands. *Gender, Migration and Social Justice*. Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace, 9, no. 9: 105–19.
- Holling, Michelle. 2006. *El Sympático Boxer: Underpinning Chicano Masculinity with a Rhetoric of Familia in Resurrection Blvd*. *Western Journal of Communication*, 70, no. 2: 91–114.
- Kelly, Reagan. 1993. Hip-hop Chicano: A Separate but Parallel Story. In *It's not About a Salary ... Race, Rap and Resistance in Los Angeles*, ed. Brian Coss, 65–78. New York: Verso.
- Kynčlová, Tereza. 2006. Constructing Mestiza Consciousness: Gloria Anzaldúa's Literary Techniques in Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 4, no. 3: 43–56.
- Kynčlová, Tereza. 2014. Elastic, Yet Unyielding: The U.S.-Mexico Border and Anzaldúa's Oppositional Rearticulations of the Frontier. *European Journal of American Studies*, 9, no. 3: 1–15.
- Le Renard, Amélie. 2014. On n'est pas formatés comme ça en Occident : Masculinités en compétition, normes de genre et hiérarchie entre nationalités dans une multinationale du Golfe [We are not programmed like this in the West: Competitive Masculinities, Gender Norms and Hierarchy between Nationalities in a Multinational Company in the Gulf]. *Sociétés contemporaines*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po (94): 41–67.
- Lopez, Nancy. 2011. Racially Stigmatized Masculinities and Empowerment: Conceptualizing and Nurturing Latino Males' Schooling in the U.S. In *Invisible No More: Understanding the Disenfranchisement of Latino Men and Boys*, ed. Hurtado Noguera and Fergus, 122–35. New York: Routledge.
- Monsutti, Alessandro. 2005. La migration comme rite de passage : la construction de la masculinité parmi les jeunes Afghans en Iran [Migration as a Rite of Passage: The Construction of Masculinity among Young Afgans in Iran]. In *Cahiers Genre et Développement*.
- Montes, Veronica. 2013. The Role of Emotions in the Construction of Masculinity: Guatemalan Migrant Men, Transnational Migration and Family Relations. *Gender & Society*, 27, no. 4: 469–90.
- Nespor, Jan. 2000. Topologies of Masculinity: Gendered Spatialities of Preadolescent Boys. In *Masculinities at School*, ed. Nancy Lesko, 27–49. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Series on Men and Masculinity.
- Pascoe, C.J. 2007. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Prokkola, Eeva-Kaisa. 2009. Unfixing Borderland Identity: Border Performances and Narratives in the Construction of Self. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 24, no. 3: 21–38.
- Ramirez, Hernan. 2011. Masculinity in the Workplace: The Case of Mexican Immigrant Gardeners. *Men and Masculinities*, 14, no. 1: 97–116.
- Rivera, Andrew. 1997. Remembrance and Forgetting: Chicano Masculinity on the Border. *Latino Studies Journal*, 8:35–55.
- Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Salvidar, José David. 1997. *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sinatti, Giulia. 2014. Masculinities and Intersectionality in Migration: Transnational Wolof Migrants Negotiating Manhood and Gendered Family Roles. *Gender, Migration and Social Justice*. Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace, 9, no. 9: 215–26.
- Staudt, Kathleen. 2008a. *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juarez*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Staudt, Kathleen. 2008b. Culture and Globalization: Male Backlash at the Border. In *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juarez*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Vasquez del Aguila, Ernesto. 2014. *Being a Man in a Transnational World: The Masculinity and Sexuality of Migration*. New York: Routledge Advances in Feminist Studies and Intersectionality.
- Vila, Pablo. 2003. Processes of Identification on the U.S.-Mexico Border. *The Social Science Journal*. 40:607–25.
- Voicu, Cristina-Georgiana. 2014. Global and Local Gender Identities: At the Crossroads of Cultural Hybridity. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, 4, no. 2: 585–94.
- Willis, Paul. 1977. *Learning to Labor: How Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.