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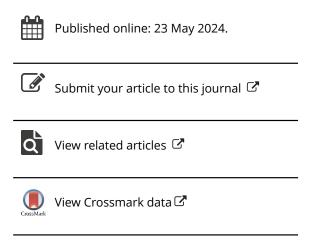
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INTRODUCTION



Formative Spaces of Empire: Masculinities and Outdoor Experiences ca. 1860–1960

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ABSTRACT

This special issue integrates gender analysis into the global history of outdoor activities in the Age of Empire by focusing on masculinities, a field that has received renewed attention from scholars. The premise of the special issue is that social constructions of masculinities in imperial settings functioned twofold. They operated simultaneously as methods to spread Western-colonial hegemonic values and as a means to expand territorial domains into far-off lands. In examining outdoor experiences, without taking the dominance of 'imperial' men over non-Europeans for granted, the contributions here presented develop an intersectional understanding of the conditions in which fashioning and self-perception of masculine roles were constantly contested and negotiated. Outdoor experiences, as seen in this special issue, were formative spaces of empire: while made possible thanks to the wide imperial networks in the colonial world, they existed on the margins of imperial rule. At the 'frontier' and in colonial battlegrounds, but also as leisure or free-time activities in transcultural contexts, outdoor experiences served to transform boys into men, and for men to test and perform hegemonic ideas of manhood and hence of imperial power. The essays are in two sections that highlight the dual processes of being and becoming 'manly' in the imperial outdoors. The first four contributions focus on archetypical roles of adult men in empires: the mountaineer, the hunter, the sportsman and the soldier. The second section approaches cases of scouting as formative spaces for boys in contexts of decolonisation in the early 1900s. The case-studies included in this special issue cover multiple imperial formations from the American Midwest, the Middle East to the British and Dutch Indies. These diverse cases serve to open up often Anglo-centric historiographies of gender and empire by emphasising the global momentum of new masculinities that were embedded in a trans-imperial fashion between ca. 1860 and 1960.

KEYWORDS

Masculinities; empire; gender; outdoors



Introduction

Historians of gender and global historians have come into closer dialogue in recent years. Most scholars now agree that gender cannot be fruitfully understood without the global, and vice-versa. Yet, while a number of impressive new studies have grown out of this marriage, an important lacuna remains. The central focus of gender and global historians rests, albeit often more implicitly than explicitly, on women and femininity. Only rather recently, men and masculinities are receiving more analytical attention from global historians and historians of empire, which seems particularly called for, given that the majority of archives and sources during the time of empire reflect male experiences and perspectives.² This is where this special issue seeks to make a contribution.

It follows Mrinalini Sinha's classic argument, which has recently been reemphasized by Ulrike Strasser and Heidi Tinsman, that masculinities are not ornaments on the margins of a presumed core content of imperial and global histories concerned with capitalism, imperial violence, state formation and resistance. Instead, masculinities are an analytical lens through which to understand the workings of imperial relations.³ The contributions in this special issue carry this argument one step further by claiming that within these imperial formations it was 'the outdoors' that served as one of the main spaces in which masculinities of colonisers, colonised and a wide range of categories in between were enacted, contested, and performed. As hunters, soldiers, explorers, mountaineers or boy scouts in forests or rivers, mountaintops and glaciers, fields of war or exploration, generations of boys and men benefitted not only from the mostly unacknowledged labour of women, but also interacted with each other across cultural, social, religious, sexual and other hierarchies or boundaries.

These 'outdoor' experiences, however, never remained outdoors, as historians of exploration and travelling have shown.⁴ A never ending flow of narrating and writing tailored to the tase of metropolitan audiences continuously connected the outdoors to metropolitan homes and the safety of the 'indoors.' In addition to narratives and texts, a multitude of objects that were brought back to the 'indoors' from the 'wilderness' and colonial frontierssuch as photographs of exotic landscapes or dead animals to be stuffedreinforced cultures of masculinities in metropolitan societies. Particularly in the period under survey, Bradley Deane has underscored how these achievements fundamentally affected popular consciousness just as they did its imperial justifications in the late Victorian context. He demonstrates how new champions emerged, like 'the untamed frontiersman, the impetuous boy, and the unapologetically violent soldier,' who replaced the 'paragons of midcentury manliness, such as the entrepreneur, the missionary, and the affectionate family man.'5 The cultural consumerism in the metropoles, full of gendered

ideals, was the fertile grounds where these 'new fantasies of an imperialist masculinity' could reproduce and reconfirmed themselves. The interconnected spaces of the colonial 'outdoors' and domestic 'indoors' thus became constitutive for the modern world by affecting all genders to this day.

Interracial marriage, domestic service or schooling in colonial settings are just a few of the topics observing gender regimes in the period of high imperialism that have been subjected to recent historical scrutiny. These studies have examined the formal and legal spaces of what Lindner and Lerp coined 'gendered imperial formations.⁶ By looking at leisure and outdoor experiences, our special issue includes the 'informal' spaces of these gendered imperial formations and, given the character and sociality of these outdoor activities, it also intersects current debates about the need for a global 'social' history. Therefore, the study of the imperial formation of masculinities could be framed as part of the consolidation of European hegemony and particularly of the emergence of a global bourgeoisie across the long nineteenth century. Outdoors activities represented opportunities for men and boys to belong to 'the mediating groups of international society,' as Richard Drayton described it.7 Arguably, sports and adventures in the colonial world allowed mimesis of masculine behaviours fused with middle-class identities and manners. In the context of European imperialism, these outdoor activities served the purposes of a transnational process of social-class identity formation. Expanding Drayton's argument, they were also entangled spaces in which to rehearse gendered constructions of manhood connected to ideas of race, social rank, and culture and civilisation in the global periphery.

In this special issue we offer six case studies that study the role of homosociality and open-air experiences for the global construction and contestation of imperial masculinities. The regions covered range from the frontiers of the American West to the rain forests of the Malayan peninsula, from the peaks of the Himalaya mountain range in British India and war-theatres in Dutch Sumatra to the remote spaces of the Iranian desert. They shed light on a shared ground of encountering masculinities in and beyond imperial settings, while reflecting on the specificities of local cultural backgrounds between c.1860 and 1960. Economic, political and social factors have been approached largely through global and imperial histories. Yet, the question of the world's man and men of the imperial age remains to be defined in order to have a full picture of the situated, embodied actors who connected disparate regions through male activities in the great outdoors. Lastly, the special issue contributes to more gendered nuances in global history research while acknowledging the role of outdoor experiences as relevant formative spaces of imperial power.

Imperial Masculinities

Since the 1980s, 'new' imperial histories and masculinity studies emerged concurrently as promising research fields.⁸ Both were informed by innovative postcolonial and feminist approaches that revitalised older debates challenging dichotomic distinctions about the metropole and the colony, men and women. They aimed to generate more nuanced, multifaceted explanations about power structures and gendered interactions in the making of societies and empires. As explored in this special issue, 'imperial masculinities' serves to analyse the convergence of these two fields by showing the entrenchment of social constructions of masculinities between imperial centres and colonial settings.⁹ At the core of our framework is the seminal concept coined by Raewyn W. Connell, 'hegemonic masculinity' referring to subject positions, mostly occupied by men, that provide and protect access to resources of power. Building on this notion, our added adjective 'imperial' to masculinities refers to the power and social conditions that allow certain ideas of men to be considered as dominant and, therefore, to be normative during the time of empire. Inversely, figures of 'imperial masculinities' might contribute to a further understanding of the broader societal changes that occurred amid gendered practices in crosscultural encounters.¹¹

After decades of prolific circulation, and not without criticism, the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' has often been refined and improved. In particular, it has long been established that masculinities are not 'fixed entities embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals,' but configurations of social practice in interaction with 'Others.' 12 We consider four concepts crucial to this debate for overcoming essentialist assumptions about men in the age of empire. Firstly, we agree that 'masculinities' ought to be understood as a fundamentally relational category. Yet, its historical evolution and effects ought not only be examined through its relation to its direct opposite, namely women and femineity. As Heather Ellis and Jessica Meyer have pointed out, 'an over-concentration on the male-female binary' ignores the fact that social, sexual, racial and other hierarchies within the category of men are also crucial in the competitive struggles to acquire or defend positions of 'hegemonic' and even 'imperial' masculinities. 13 Summarising these discussions, Jürgen Martschukat and Olaf Stieglitz argue that histories of masculinity should be theorised in such a way that they can contribute to feminist studies on intersectionality. These consider how multiple power relations create a complex network of subject positions. Depending on the 'intersection' at which history has positioned different categories of people, they have different amounts of resources and power to conduct their relationships with or struggles against other people.¹⁴ Intersectionality is thus a second keyconcept for 'imperial masculinities'.

A third key notion is that of 'crisis'. It arises from the fact that the ideal of omnipotent imperial or hegemonic masculinities, supposedly detached from mundane dependencies on food, attention, rest, security and comfort etc. can never be fully achieved. Emotional individuals with vulnerable bodies and souls will necessarily always fall short in their longing for this ideal. The ideal of hegemonic or imperial masculinities is always threatened by potential illness, defeat, embarrassment, fear, and other supposed 'weaknesses' that are usually associated with women and 'lesser' men. Masculinities, in other words, are always operating in a mode of crisis, either trying to overcome crisis or to prevent it. At the same time, mastering potential crisis is one of the most important ways of performing masculinities, as Elahe Haschemi Yekani and others have so convincingly shown. 15 This insight is relevant to the contributions in this volume because the 'manly outdoors'- as a space that is constructed against the security of the (effeminate) 'indoors'- is where masculinities are enacted.

The fourth and last notion that we see as pivotal to our understanding of 'imperial masculinities' is one that has been elaborated by Patricia Purtschert and Naomi Oreskes, among others. It is the idea of 'heroism', with its flipside of potential self-destruction and death. 16 Purtschert exemplified this in her analysis of white men in the so-called 'death zone'. The 'death zone' is a concept developed in mountaineering literature in the mid-1950s in the context of growing competition in high altitude climbing in the Himalaya at a time when Britain and other European powers had to come to terms with the loss of their colonial empires. It refers to altitudes of above 8,000 metres, where lack of oxygen can lead to hallucinations and pose serious threats to health, sometimes resulting in death. In analysing mountaineering literature, Purtschert shows how white European men benefitted in multiple ways from the emotional, physical and other labour from women and racialized 'lesser' men (the 'Sherpas'), which is either omitted or downgraded in their publications, to reach the 'death zone'. There, white men would, ideally, leave their last accompanying racialized assistants behind to face the ultimate struggle 'without help': to survive the lack of oxygen and the resulting threats to the functioning of their bodies and minds, as well as their fears. To reach the summit and return from the 'dead zone', Purtschert argues, these men needed to fight the non-manly, effeminate limits within themselves to return either as ultimate men who had overcome all their bodily, emotional and mental limitations, if they survived. If they died, they would be idolised by their peers as martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the ultimate manly cause.

Pointing out the potentially self-destructive and self-sacrificing nature of the pursuit of the unattainable ideal of hegemonic and imperial masculinities, Purtschert comes to similar findings as did Oreskes in her seminal work on the role of heroism in the history of science. Like Purtschert, Oreskes too points out that this heroic gesture was an exclusive privilege of (white) men. 18 As with mountaineering, in science too, women were assigned only supporting roles that went mostly unacknowledged in scientific publications. In the field of science, however, it wasn't the pursuit of altitude and symbolically overcoming death that was at stake. It was the pursuit of ultimate and extremely exclusive truths. These truths could only be found with dangerous and potentially deadly experiments, for example by testing the effects of drugs on oneself, or through exploring dangerous territories. Here the laboratory or the scientific field served similar functions to the 'dead zone'. If male scientists came out alive, they would be heroes. If they died, they would be seen as heroes too, having sacrificed their lives in pursuit of a universal ideal. Purtschert and Oreskes both point out that this way of rationalising an irrational behaviour was only open to subjects who had the power to claim rationality for themselves. The exact same behaviour by women and other supposedly irrational or less rational subjects would have been seen as irresponsible neglect of their 'natural' duties, which was to care for children and families or serve their masters.

In summary, our ideas of 'imperial masculinities' and the 'outdoors' benefit from Connell's gender and masculinities theories and the work they inspired in three ways: 19 they conceptualise masculinities as a fundamentally relational category that is constructed, contested, and enacted in power relations against non-men and supposedly lesser men, women and/or socially, sexually, or racially devalued 'others'; masculinities are always in crisis, and the 'outdoors' is the archetypical site where mastering, preventing or overcoming of crisis in its most existential (live-threatening) form can be performed; masculinities as the pursuit of heroism are potentially life-threatening, therefore they had to be contained and rationalise the irrational behaviour of self-harming or suicide.

The Contributions

The contributions in this special issue provide archive based, empirical micro studies of how imperial masculinities were performed in different outdoor settings. They span a wide geographical space from the American Midwest, the Middle East, and British and Dutch South and Southeast Asia, with repercussions in Central and Western Europe. They shed light on different historical constellations between ca. 1860 and 1960, providing insights into transformations and continuities in male struggles for power and control from the era of high imperialism to the period of decolonisation. Together, these case studies bring geographical breadth and historical depth to histories of modern masculinities that are still too often studied within Anglo-centric and other national frameworks. In addition, these papers focus on men at different stages of their lives between boyhood and manhood. We have divided the papers into two categories. The first four articles deal with adult males in imperial outdoor settings, while the last two contributions are dedicated to constructions of boyhood in contexts of 'modern' national identity building.

Men in the Outdoors

Class and race hierarchies were at the core of outdoor activities, reproducing and reinforcing social structures from the metropole to the so-called wilderness. The natural spaces, however, allowed these social and power differences to be contested because of territorial cognisance or the physical adaptability of local actors. Applying the relational understanding of masculinities outlined above, Lachlan Fleetwood's article shows how climbing the highest peaks in the Himalaya during the late colonial period in British India and making claims about the world 'altitude record' were a Western construction of a scientific and imperial ideal of masculinity. This construction relied on the unacknowledged labour and expertise of other men, namely, the Gurkhas and the Sherpas assigned the supposedly more 'feminine' tasks. In this case, the physical achievement and the alliance with Gurkhas and Sherpas to reach high Himalayan peaks suggests an ideal of imperial masculinity which depended much on non-European actors. Moreover, Fleetwood also points out subtle hierarchies between different European men: the British mountaineers claiming priority in 'their' (former) empire, and the Swiss mountain guides there only as guests and assisting managers. Finally, narrating heroic sufferings and achievements in the Royal Geographic Society in London contributed to overarching cultures of imperial masculinities in the imperial metropole.²⁰

Karen Jones' contribution starts with a stuffed bison in North American urban houses to reflect how 'heroic hunting' at the American 'frontier' affected American culture more broadly in the late nineteenth century. Out in the 'Wilderness' men faced and, ideally, overcame death by killing other deadly animals. The kill, in Jones' words, 'represented the landmark moment of manly restoration'. The imperial quality of these performances in the US 'frontier' become unequivocally clear through the simultaneous appropriation and denigration of Native American hunting techniques, and through military testimonies that used similar language to game hunting to describe the wars against 'the American Indian'. White, imperial masculinities were both threatened and reinforced by lower class men in the 'outdoors' who performed 'female' tasks of cooking and admiring the hunter around the camp fire, as well as by the occasional women who accompanied their men on hunting trips. As Jones goes on to illuminate, hunting literature, art, photography, but also taxidermy ('stuffed animals') brought imperial male heroism into the domestic sphere of the private home or the public museum, and thereby turned hunting into a pillar of US popular culture.

Meanwhile in South Asia, an old game played by both sexes sitting on a horse and chasing after a small ball with a stick, acquired fundamentally new meanings when the British increased their colonial grip over India in the second half of the nineteenth century. As Luise Elsaesser shows, the British colonial army appropriated the outdoor game of polo as a way for their officers to perform their elite masculinity during times of peace and the absence of the battlefield. Importantly, polo served not only British imperial interests; it also allowed Indian aristocratic elites to perform their own elite masculinities. Competing, and frequently winning, against the British allowed India's conservative elites



to protect their claims to power from the growing critique of the nationalist movement, while at the same time benefitting from British privileges. The British, on the other hand, secured the loyalty of Indian aristocrats who maintained order and thereby protected colonial rule. While polo in India allowed for cross-racial complicit masculinities to thrive, the game served other functions in Britain itself. There it evolved as a highly exclusive leisure activity for the aristocracy to publically distinguish themselves from both lower-class and non-white men alike.

Physical prowess and self-reliance in the wilderness or on the playing fields were only some of the elements that constituted the ideal of an imperial man. The outdoor space in the colonial world presented other sets of 'challenges' that European soldiers, officers and scientists needed to overcome. The acclimatisation to the tropical environment and its inter-racial sociality threatened Western ideals of hegemonic masculinity in different ways. Tropical diseases and 'vices', such as alcohol consumption and prostitution, were replaced by virtues such as constraint and rationality, at the core of imperial masculinity in the colonial outdoors.²¹ By focusing on the trajectories of Swiss, German and Austrian physicians in the Dutch Colonial Army between 1814 and 1914, Monique Ligtenberg sheds light on these educated men who worked behind the front lines and consequently contradicted the masculine ideal of the fighting soldier, but who reinterpreted this supposed flaw. They positioned themselves as heroic experts who fought much more dangerous enemies; tropical diseases, epidemics, but also the dissolute behaviour of soldiers. As a conse-Christian-bourgeois manners associated with modesty respectability were recalled as 'scientific' discourses about better men in the Dutch colonial space. Following the intersectional approach, Ligtenberg's paper goes further by analysing the construction of imperial masculinity, distinguishing it not only from the 'Oriental' Other, but also from lower-class Europeans. Replicating class stereotypes from the metropole, doctors pointed to the 'licentious' behaviour of European soldiers and sailors in Aceh. This case shows how relevant it is to examine the social construction of imperial masculinities in all its combined elements. While the strength and self-reliance of adventurous and army men were important, diseases, vices and threats of different kinds were also ways to forge ideals of hegemonic masculinity in the colonial space. The study of the dynamics between imperial power and ideals of hegemonic masculinity, as this paper and our special issue propose, should avoid straightforward explanations by 'pointing to their fragile, contested and historically contingent character,' in Ligtenberg's words.

Modern Boys in the Imperial Making

Imperial masculinities in the outdoors were not only contested and negotiated; they were above all 'in the making' as part of a larger phenomenon connected

with the modern institutionalisation of education globally. In this line, the last two articles in this special issue revise the role of empire and anti-imperial nationalism in the construction of early twentieth century boyhood. In comparison to adult masculinities, studies on childhood and boyhood are a comparatively less-scrutinized field of inquiry. Yet, as Gail Bederman has shown, education of boys often included a balancing act between metropolitan and (imaginary) colonial spaces. The security of the motherly home ('indoors') included also fears of 'overcivilizing' boys by preventing them to transform their supposed innate 'savage instincts' into disciplined strength and courage as grown-up men.²² As Harald Fischer-Tiné has recently explained, fears as these were part of a 'a quasi-scientific discourse of boyology,' which operated in a transnational trend during the period under survey.²³ Similarly to social constructions of adult men, modern ideals of boyhood circulated widely across imperial spaces and beyond. These significant contributions reveal how crucial it is to consider the full age spectrum in the analysis of social constructions of men by including, namely, boys.

The contributions of Sivan Balslev and Jialin Christina Wu in this special issue address this topic in the Iranian and Malayan contexts, providing comprehensive insights into the manufacturing of imperial boys. Balslev's article explores transformations from traditional to more 'modern' boyhood under the reign of Reza Shah Palavi in the Imperial State of Iran during the 1920s and 30s. Focussing on the newly introduced boy scout movement of the era, Balslev explains how the leisure activities of young men in Iran aimed to promote westernised values of a modern man, while preventing local vices such as using opium or alcohol, and gambling. By interfering in the private sphere of Iranian boys, the scouting movement and its well-established transnational networks of modern educators had the potential to 'disrupt family patterns, economic activity, processes of socialisation, and moral norms.' In the Iranian context, the construction of imperial young masculinities was closely connected to a renewed nationalism: disciplined, self-reliant, and physically trained boys fulfilled the expectations of future soldiers and citizens. Far from being a 'pure' nationalist creation, this kind of imperial masculinity was a co-constitution of a global bourgeoisie. It intersected gendered constructions and ideas of race and social rank with the needs of a modern state in Iran.

Scouting in British Malaya, as detailed by Jialin Christina Wu, shared similar trends towards a modern boyhood: ruggedness, the disciplined cleanliness of outdoor living and camaraderie. Moreover, it forged a 'boys-only world' between children of diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds in a colonised setting. Camping and hiking within the scouting movement in British Malaya created a homosocial environment where 'divisions of class and ethnicity could be suspended (albeit temporarily sometimes).' Wu's case is a paradigmatic example of the cross-cultural and intersectional approach to the study of imperial (young and adult) masculinities in the outdoors. First, it combines



both archival and primary sources with the oral histories of (former) Malayan scouts, whose accounts contest lineal interpretations about power, imperialism and education in the outdoors. These oral testimonies enable us to understand the preeminent role that the scouting movement had for social mobility in British Malaya beyond race and class difference. Second, the outdoors in precolonial Malaya functioned already, according to Wu, 'as a liminal space between childhood and adulthood.' Her paper highlights how a pre-colonial Malayan hegemonic masculinity, based on an active, healthy, and 'virile' boyhood, was transformed and adapted by the scouting movement during colonial rule. In the British Malayan context, scouting amalgamized the social construction of modern boys by fusing local values and westernised ideals of hegemonic masculinity in the outdoor space.

Considering the continuities in the constructions of manhood and boyhood presented in this special issue, the inter-generational analysis of masculinities also addresses the issue of national and imperial identity formation.²⁴ Ideals of physical prowess and loyalty, representing hegemonic values, operated in distinct ways in the outdoor space depending on age. For adult scientists, mountaineers and hunters, it was the means to perform and attest imperial supremacy in front of other men, exploring the limits of natural and colonial domains. For boys educated in a transcultural and colonial setting, the importation of organised outdoor activities like the scouting movement intended to forge the 'future man,' who would later serve the interests of the modern nation. In a context of increasing militarism, these ideals of imperial masculinities were complemented by concerns about physical training and values of respect that served the purposes of social and colonial order. Particularly for urban boys of middle and elite backgrounds, scouting, hiking and camping were suitable activities to nurture a muscular and self-reliant manhood in nature. The scholarship has discussed the implications of scouting movements as part of the training of future soldiers and citizens. ²⁵ As shown by Balslev and Wu, the movement served to challenge old-fashioned traditional masculine figures, like the affectionate man or the sedentary bureaucratic man with his weak and degenerated body. Such activities allowed state and colonial educational authorities to overcome the boundaries between the public and the private spheres. Boys were educated at school and also in their outdoor 'free time' for the sake of a new modern national state.

Conclusions

As shown by the six contributions to this special issue, intersectional and crosscultural dimensions are key features in the study of imperial masculinities. Mimesis and the appropriation of masculine ideals were the tools of dominant and subaltern groups to live with and without, and to rehearse implicit and explicit authority in the global outdoors. These strategies reinforced and challenged normative ideals of boy- and manhood at the margins of the formal structures of empires. In the mountains, the desert or back in the metropole, boys were taught to be men who could prove their manhood outdoors, although the meaning of manhood depended on specific historical conditions and could never be fully embodied. Imperial constructions of masculinities were, most of the time, threatened and contested and therefore needed to be recalibrated. In the formative spaces of outdoor activities, both the material or the imagined, boys and men performed and embedded ideals of hegemonic masculinity that ultimately refuelled the fantasies and experiences in the making of European empires and the anti-imperial aspirations of new nations such as Malaya or Iran.

These six articles only give a small insight into the history of imperial masculinities. However, we hope that they make clear the potential of this analytical perspective. The Age of Imperialism was also the age of modern masculinities. The historic empires disappeared from the scene a few decades ago. They left behind a foundation of colonial nostalgia that informs power and masculinities in former metropoles and colonies to this day. To unravel the sinister combination of power, violence and hegemonic imperial masculinities, further efforts are needed to explore colonial history as the history of a calamitous pursuit of hegemonic masculinity. Only when masculinities of the imperial age are historicised and deconstructed do alternative masculinities beyond autocracy and populism become conceivable. Such a pursuit seems more necessary than ever in the contemporary world of accelerated globalisation and climate change.

Notes

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