



Panel report:

## Men in Nature and the Nature of Men: Forging Masculinities Outdoors in the Age of Empire, c. 1870–1970

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*Convener: Monique Ligtenberg, Haraldt Fischer-Tiné*

*Participants: Charlotte Hoes, Monique Ligtenberg, Haraldt Fischer-Tiné*

*Comments by Olaf Stieglitz*

### Report by: Claire Hoffmann, University of Fribourg

Questioning how white and non-white masculinity is constructed in a colonial context is a complex question, as “Men’s studies” emerged later than “Women’s studies” and receives less attention. However, considering the relation between nature and men can be revealing of the construction of masculine identity. Thus, this panel focused on the relation between men, animal traders, white missionaries as well as Indian men, and nature during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in South-East Asia and Africa.

Firstly, **CHARLOTTE HOES** (Göttingen) focused on the construction of white masculinity through the lens of animal trade. Her prime interest was the Ruhe Wild Animal Trade, a family business created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Germany who used to be the biggest animal trader in the 1920’s and who happened to be rather independent from the German colonial policy. In this colonial context, especially in Africa, hunting was a symbol of men’s superiority, especially of white men, over nature. Hoes illustrated the distinction between white hunters and indigenous hunters using trophy pictures, where the body of the white hunter is at the center of the image, suggesting his importance. However, according to Hoes, there is a difference between the way hunters and traders describe their domain. Indeed, whilst hunters’ prey consisted in male animals, traders focused their efforts on killing the female animals whilst keeping their offspring alive. However, due to growing environmental concern, Ruhe traders had to adapt, says Hoes, and thus influencing the evolution of the trader’s role. Indeed, she mentions how the trader is thus perceived as a protector of nature from the 1920’s to the 1950’s.

The second intervention, given by **MONIQUE LIGTENBERG** (Zürich), focused on the Aceh War (1873–1904/14) in Sumatra, an episode characterized by Dutch imperialism and the presence of foreign medical practitioners in the colonial forces. The historian firstly discussed the importance of Germanophone staff in the Dutch empire, in view of the Netherlands being a small nation governing an enormous empire. According to Ligtenberg, the Germanophone doctors could be qualified as be-



ing “medical missionaries”. However, tropical diseases, such as Beri Beri, was completely unknown to the European medical staff, leaving these “medical missionaries” clueless against this major biological threat. Due to their inability to provide proper care, explains Ligtenberg, indigenous women were thus asked to help heal sick imperial staff. However, the presence of indigenous women was not strictly limited to medical care, as they would also do domestic tasks in army camps. Some would also have sexual relations with imperial staff who hire them, leading to the birth of children out of wedlock. However, as these women were perceived to belong to a lower-class, and thus were associated to prostitution, the fear of syphilis and of moral corruption of the imperial elite grew stronger in camps, explains Ligtenberg. One of the medical practitioners studied by the historian would thus propose a way to solve this issue: allow army staff to bring their European wives in the camp. Thus, the historian illustrated how imperial staff tried to preserve their bourgeois nature and how they would control lower-class men and women as well as the importance of indigenous women in medical care in a colonial context.

The final presentation was given by **HARADLT FISCHER-TINÉ** (Zürich) and questioned the role of biking in the construction of Indian masculinity in relation to British colonial masculinity. Indeed, Fischer-Tiné argues that through sports, Indian men reacted to their depiction in British media, being represented as effeminate and emasculated in comparison to English men. Notably, they would either go back to their tradition in a proto-nationalist way or they would appropriate popular British sports such as crickets or soccer in order to beat the British at their own game. After a brief recapitulation of the social history of biking, where the historian explained how the bike, which was, at first, a bourgeois masculine means of recreation notably thanks to cycling globetrotters or bike competitions such as the Paris-Brest race, the historian examined the exportation of the bicycle. Indeed, in the 1880's, the bike was introduced in French Algeria and other British colonies, provoking a mixed response in the native population, as bicycles were associated with imperial powers such as the police and other administrative staff. However, by the 1930, the bicycle was appropriated by the middle class, as the upper class and the upper middle class replaced the bike with cars. Fischer-Tiné then focused on two specific cases of Indian men partaking in cycling globetrotting. The first one was a crew of three Indian men who worked with imperial power and were linked with the YMCA and the boy scouts. According to Fischer-Tiné, they would have encountered numerous difficulties due to the environment in which they would cycle, such as snow, desertic areas, and so on. The second case consisted of an analysis of the globetrotting experience of a single man who was more involved in politics as he was a part of the revolutionary society. In these two cases, Fischer-Tiné noticed three recurring themes: patriotism, everyday racism, notably the lack thereof, in France for example, or their experience of travel restrictions, and the reversing of the gaze, where in one account, they would describe the South of Europe as being dirty, illustrating their disappointment.

All in all, this panel managed to exemplify the diversity of the construction of masculinity found in colonial context. While the link between nature and this subject could, at time, be hard to grasp, the three historians highlighted the key points in the multi-layers discourses that is masculin-



ity. Furthermore, although there were limits imposed by the types of sources used, as Hoes, for example, could only focus on published primary sources as well as photographs, Fischer-Tiné, Hoes and Ligtenberg managed to provide a very interesting analysis of the connection between men and nature.

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**Panel overview:**

Charlotte Hoes: Between Catching and Caring: Navigating Imperial Masculinity in Animal Trade

Monique Ligtenberg: (Re-)negotiating Identities in the Kampong: Masculinities, Medical Mercenaries, and the Aceh War (c. 1873-1900)

Haraldt Fischer-Tiné: Menmaking and Worldmaking on Two Wheels: Globetrotting Cyclists and the Recuperation of Bengali Masculinity in the Interwar Years

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