Marginalized Masculinities and the Nation:  
Global Comparisons, 1800-1945  

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Historical scholarship has long established the inextricable interrelationship between gender and the nation. Feminist scholars in particular have demonstrated how male nationalists incorporated women as symbolic, cultural, and biological reproducers of the nation into their “imagined communities.” Most studies on the subject tend to focus on the tensions between women’s inclusion in nationalist discourse and their exclusion from political decision-making. Others have explored women’s active role in nation-building projects. Despite scholars’ insistence on the relational character of gender, however, masculinity continues to be neglected by scholars of gender and the nation. If masculinity is addressed, historians either overstate the cohesion of interests among men or focus exclusively on hegemonic models of manhood and the corresponding perpetuation of the nation-state and patriarchy.

This conference seeks to provide a fresh perspective on the interrelationship between gender and the nation by focusing on the role of marginalized masculinities in nation-building processes between 1800 and 1945. During that period, the emergence of particular forms of masculinity coincided with the founding of modern-nation states. Scientific racism, Imperialism, eugenics, and other forms of exclusion and subjugation became part and parcel of these gendered nation-building processes. Seeking to detect similarities/dissimilarities and continuities/discontinuities across space and time, the conference includes papers on North- and South America, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, all of which shed light on the history of the interrelationship between marginalized masculinities and the nation in the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century.

The conference organizers believe that the constructed character and function of manhood in people’s attempts to create “imagined communities” during that period cannot be fully comprehended if the exclusive focus of analysis is the subjugation of women or their resistance to and complicity in that subjugation. Concentrating exclusively on hegemonic masculinity in these processes seems similarly narrow. To understand hegemonic notions of masculinity and the nation, we need to explore the tensions and interrelationships between these dominant concepts and their margins. Studying the history of gender and the nation from the perspective of marginalized masculinities means focusing on the conflicts among competing concepts of manhood as well as on the differences between them. Far from being one ideologically monolithic bloc, men’s access to and interest in nation-building power varies considerably according to race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, etc. The conference focuses on these various fragmentations and their role in the creation, expansion, consolidation, and decline of nations around the globe.