Captivité de guerre au XXème siècle: des archives, des histoires, des mémoires / Captivity in 20th Century Warfare: Archives, History, Memory

Veranstalter: Anne-Marie Pathe / Fabien Theofilakis, Paris; Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (CNRS); Université de Paris Ouest; Direction de la Mémoire, du Patrimoine et des Archives; London School of Economics and Political Science
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The international conference „Captivité de guerre au XXème siècle: des archives, des histoires, des mémoires" („Captivity in 20th Century Warfare: Archives, History, Memory") took place in Paris, France at École Militaire from November 17-18, 2011. Organized by Anne-Marie Pathe (Paris) and Fabien Theofilakis (Paris), the conference was funded by the Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (CNRS), the Université de Paris Ouest, and the Direction de la Mémoire, du Patrimoine et des Archives, in partnership with the London School of Economics and Political Science. The impetus for the conference was the IHTP's recent acquisition of rich primary sources pertaining to the captivity of Georges Mongrédien, a French officer held as a prisoner of war in Germany from 1940-1945. The availability of these and other new sources allow scholars to shed light on the conditions of millions of soldiers and civilians who were interned during the wars of the twentieth century, the experiences of whom have largely been overshadowed by those living on the war or home fronts. The conference was organized into four themes: artistic and intellectual life in captivity; the laws and regulations that governed the lives of prisoners; the relationships between prisoners and society at large; and prisoners' and captors' perceptions of each other. Papers were presented in English and French; simultaneous translations were provided in both languages.

The first theme was explored primarily by a set of papers that examined prisoners' artistic activities and productions. IRIS RACHAMINOV (Tel-Aviv) argued that WWI prisoners of war (POWs) combated the liminal nature of their captivity by creating theatrical productions and a culture of camp domesticity. Rachaminov held that the presence of female impersonators and the formation of familial relationships between younger and older officers allowed POWs to reclaim a masculinity rooted in heterosexual desire and traditional family values, even as these activities transgressed conventional gender norms. MATTHIAS REIß (Exeter) also took up the issue of gender, arguing that theatrical performances helped the soldiers of the German Afrika Corps, taken prisoner by the United States in WWII, to maintain a soldierly masculinity grounded in the maintenance of military discipline, the display of muscular bodies, and the frequent expression of heterosexual desire. SUSANNE SNIZEK (Victoria) described the composition of Hans Gál's Huyton Suite, a first-rate piece of chamber music written under repressive conditions for one flute and two violins. PETER SCHOTTLER's (Paris/Berlin) presentation examined the work of historian Fernand Braudel, POW in Germany from 1940-1945, arguing that Braudel's seminal book „The Mediterranean" reveals many reflections on contemporary history in addition to those on the sixteenth century.

The next group of papers focused on the laws and regulations that governed the living conditions and treatment of prisoners. HEATHER JONES (London) examined the extent to which international rules of war actually succeeded in protecting WWI prisoners. She argued that even though these agreements were often breached, they created the conditions necessary for the intervention of humanitarian aid organizations such as the Red Cross. RÜDIGER OVERMANS's (Freibourg) paper dealt with the increased rates of morality among Jewish Soviet POWs who were held in Germany. Overmans argued that the German government's desire to protect its own POWs required the humane treatment of the Jewish soldiers from most Allied nations. However, because this spirit of reciprocity did not exist between the Soviet Union and Germany, Jewish Soviet soldiers were the victims of brutal treatment and murder in German camps. DELPHINE DEBONS

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(Lausanne) presented on the religious rights granted to prisoners held by Germany during WWII. While the Third Reich generally respected the rights granted to detainees under the Geneva Conventions of 1929, including the right to practice religion freely, it imposed some limitations on prisoners' religious practice. SYLVIE THÉNAULT (Paris) compared the legal status of Algerian POWs captured during the nineteenth-century colonial war and those captured during the Algerian War of Independence. While France classified both groups of prisoners as „internees," the rights granted to Algerian prisoners varied considerably in each of these two wars.

The third thematic looked at relationships between prisoners and society outside the camps. SARAH FRANK's (Dublin) paper examined the aid given to French colonial prisoners of war held in frontstalags in Occupied France from 1940-1945 by local French populations. GEORG KRIES (Basel) explored authorities' efforts to reduce contact between the local Swiss population and the Soviet civilian prisoners interned by Germany in Switzerland from 1942-1945. Despite these attempts to separate the prisoners from broader society, Kreis showed, local Swiss people developed positive images of the Soviet internees that contradicted the stereotypes of the drunk and violent Russian. PATRIZIA DOGLIANI (Bologna) examined the interactions between German POWs held in Rimini, Italy, their guards, and the local population as Italy began its postwar political reconstruction in 1945. FABIEN THÉOFILAKIS (Paris) presented a paper on the interactions between German POWs held in France from 1944-1948. His paper analyzed French and German perceptions of one another in order to show how these interactions helped lead to a more sincere Franco-German rapprochement than that following WWI.

The last group of papers dealt with prisoners' and captors' views of one another. BOB MOORE (Sheffield) analyzed British opinions of the German and Italian POWs held during WWII. Moore traced the emergence and transformation of two competing perceptions of the prisoners: the Italians as a politically harmless, useful supplementary labor force and the Germans as dedicated Nazis who could only be safely held in Canada. RAFFAEL SCHECK (Waterville) examined the case of French „indigenous" prisoners from 1940-1945, interned by Germany but guarded by French officers. While many historians have treated Vichy's agreement to make French officers the guards for French colonial prisoners as a particularly despicable act of collaboration with the Third Reich, Scheck argued that this decision was a rather typical instance of collaboration in which the Vichy government sought to combine opposition and compliance to protect its own interests. RAPHAËLLE BRANCHE's (Paris) paper dealt with the treatment of French prisoners by the Algerian National Liberation Front. Since French authorities refused to recognize Algerian captives as POWs to whom the Geneva Conventions applied, the Algerian seizure of French POWs was intended to pressure French authorities into classifying the conflict as a state of war. PIERRE JOURNOUD (Paris) examined the case of American soldiers taken prisoner during the Vietnam War. While the memory of the horrific treatment endured by many POWs has blocked efforts at rapprochement with Vietnam, some former POWs, Journoud argued, have worked to overcome these experiences and to reconstruct diplomatic relations between America and Vietnam.

In addition to these papers, the conference offered practical assistance to those researching the topic of captivity by featuring presentations from archivists whose collections include sources pertaining to captivity in twentieth-century wars. Representatives from the *Archives Nationales, the Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire, the Établissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense, the Bureau des Archives des Victims des Conflits Contemporains, the Comité International de la Croix-Rouge, and the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine* gave overviews of these collections, much of which contained information related to the soldiers who were imprisoned during WWI and WWII.[1]

[1] These materials can be accessed online at: http://www.ihtp.cnrs.fr/spip.php%3Frubrique222&lang=fr.html (22.12.2011).

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The conference concluded on Friday evening with a reading from the journal of Georges Mongrédien and a performance of Hans Gál's „Huyton Suite". The papers and archival materials presented during the two-day event marked a significant contribution to the study of captivity as well as a call for continued research. By establishing a narrative of the events that shaped the lives of prisoners in a variety of national contexts, the papers opened the door for further analysis of how men and women lived and understood their captivity. Subsequent studies should mine the newly available sources to continue examining the ways in which religion, gender, class, and national belonging worked to organize relationships within camps and to construct individual and collective identities. Additionally, it seems productive to consider the ways in which power was both exercised and challenged. What were the social and symbolic forms of camp surveillance and how were these reified and contested by the prisoners they sought to control? The papers presented at this conference provide a wonderful starting point for exploring these questions and help to recover the experience of captivity within the historiography of war.

Conference overview:

John Horne (Trinity College): Opening Remarks

Iris Rachaminov (Tel-Aviv University): Liminality and Transgression: Breaching Social Boundaries in WWI Internment Camps

Matthias Reiß (University of Exeter): Half-Naked Nazis: Masculinity and Gender in German POW Camps in the USA during WWII

Peter Schöttler (IHTP/Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte): Fernand Braudel, prisonnier en Allemange et l'histoire du temps présent

Suzanne Snizek (University of Victoria): 'It's Growing like an Asparagus': British internment and Gál's Huyton Suite trio

Heather Jones (The London School of Economics and Political Science): Humanitarian intervention, breaches of international law and western POWs

Rüdiger Overmans (Freibourg): The fate of the Jewish POWs in German Hands

Delphine Debons (Institut universitaire d'histoire de la médecine et de la santé publique): 'Tout est possible à celui qui croit' (Marc, 9:23)? La réglementation de la vie religieuse dans les camps de prisonniers de guerre de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale

Sylvie Thénault (Centre d'Histoire Sociale du XXe siècle-CNRS): L'internement: une forme de captivité de guerre?

Edmund Clark (British artist): Guantanamo: If the Light Goes Out: Images of Home, Memory, and Disorientation

Sarah Frank (Trinity College): Les prisonniers de guerre coloniaux: Experiences et enjeux

Georg Kreis (Europainstitut der Universität Basel): Le traitement des prisonniers de guerre soviétiques en Suisse, de l'évasion à l'extradition vers l'URSS

Patrizia Dogliani (Università di Bologna): D'alliés à ennemis: Les prisonniers de l'armée allemande en Italie, 1945-1947

Fabien Théofilakis (Université Paris Ouest Nanterre/University of Augsburg): 'Il est si gentil, ce Rudolph!': les prisonniers de guerre allemands au contract des populations civiles francaises (1944-1948)

Bob Moore (University of Sheffield): Perceptions of Axis Captives in the British Isles, 1939-1948

Raffael Scheck (Colby College): Des officiers français comme geôliers de leurs propres soldats? Les prisonniers de guerre 'indigènes' sous encadrement français, 1943-1944

Raphaëlle Branche (Paris I/Centre d'Histoire Sociale du XXème Siècle-CNRS): Le Front de Libération Nationale Algérien (FLN) face aux soldats français prisonniers

Pierre Journoud (IRSEM): Le rôle des prisonniers de guerre américains dans le rapprochement entre les Etats-Unis et le Vietnam

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