

## *Call for Papers*

*Visualizations of War Captivity – Performativity, Reconciliation, Irreconcilability*

Conference: October 10-11, 2024 at the University of Bonn

Organized by: Esther Gardei, Marion Gymnich, Benet Lehmann, Hans-Georg Soeffner

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine underlines the topicality of the topic of war captivity and the importance of its representation in the media. The conference seeks to examine visualizations of war captivity in the 20th and 21st centuries. Visual representations of war captivity across different times, regions and media can be linked by common questions. How do visual representations of prisoners of war relate to the prospect of reconciliation? How is the role of prisoners of war visually staged? On the one hand, they are condemned to a certain passivity, as they find themselves in a strong asymmetrical relationship of dependency; on the other hand, they are often expected to organize their daily lives. How is the question of guilt taken into account? Prisoners of war may have been involved in war crimes and thus be perpetrators; in captivity, however, they can become victims. Is it possible to identify such a dual role – in specific historical and cultural contexts – through the portrayal of prisoners of war from different perspectives? Can a change of perspective in this context be understood in the sense of a structural prerequisite for “reconciliation” (cf. on “change of perspective” as a structural prerequisite for reconciliation Gardei, Schulz, Soeffner 2023)? We conceive of “reconciliation” as a utopia and understand it as the transformation of conditions of war and enmity into free relationships of recognition (Soeffner 2023), which exhibit characteristics of trust and friendship (Pfeil 2022, 18).

War captivity can be examined as a performative practice whose historical and cultural contexts must be taken into account. Photographs of prisoners of war were often used for propaganda purposes and sometimes even deliberately arranged to this end. In addition to the intention, other aspects must likewise be considered when interpreting visual representations of war captivity, such as the subcutaneous messages of the faces of the photographed persons or the arrangement of objects.

Up to now, the exploration of this rich material with regard to its potential for understanding “reconciliation” and “irreconcilability” has been a gap in research. The conference provides room for case studies that present and interpret specific visual material,

but also for methodological papers from fields such as photographic ethnography, image hermeneutics, theories of visual sociology, visual history, research on photography and the functions of visualizing history. We would like to offer researchers and cultural practitioners the opportunity to present and discuss their research, relevant practical projects and experimental formats. We also encourage Master's students and PhD researchers to submit abstracts. All presentations should present visual material. The conference will be held in German and English.

Questions such as the following could be addressed in the presentations: How is the prisoner of war status shown in the pictures? What differences can be identified in the treatment of prisoners of war? Who were the photographers, artists or filmmakers, and on whose behalf were the images created? What objectives can be identified (e.g. documentation, self-justification, manipulation, propaganda)? What academic status do the photographs have with regard to the reconstruction of the history of the respective war and/or the post-war period? To what extent can photographs contribute to irreconcilability or reconciliation?

Please, submit abstracts by May 2, 2024. Abstracts should be sent as PDF documents to [vforum@uni-bonn.de](mailto:vforum@uni-bonn.de). The presentation should not exceed 20 minutes.

We do not charge a participation fee for the workshop. Travel expenses and fees will be covered for the speakers.

The conference is organized in the context of the interdisciplinary reconciliation research of the Bonn Center for Reconciliation Research (BZV), in cooperation with the Cluster of Excellence 'Beyond Slavery and Freedom: Asymmetrical Dependencies in Pre-Modern Societies'.