

War, Society, and Culture in Britain, c. 1688-1830 Conference

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School of History
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Pedro Couceiro (Higher School of Education - Polytechnic Institute of Bragança): Peninsular War and society - the impacts of the French invasions at Porto (1807-11)

During the peninsular war, Porto was invaded two times for french troops (1808-1809). The Portuguese traditional sources about the French invasions describe, on a patriotic rhetoric and through a denunciative discourse, and beyond a whole series of economic and social constraints and the governmental disorientation that the kingdom suffered by the usurpation of power, a series of abuses and outrages perpetrated by the French and English troops that victimize the population of Porto. Among the many possible approaches, we privilege an assessment of the impacts of war from the people's daily life in an adverse context. We intend to feel, through their reports and diverse sources of information, the economic, social, organizational and sociability constraints in an adverse context of military occupation of the real urban space, further compounded by the absence of the Portuguese government exile in Brazil and a decreased local authority before the haughty ways of the "enemy".

Elodie Duche (University of Warwick): Embattled Britons: The Society of British Prisoners of War on Hostile French Shores (1803-1814)

Captured in the various theatres of a global and total war, around 15 000 British subjects were detained in France during the Napoleonic Era. Either civilians arrested en masse in 1803, or military and merchant servicemen (Royal Navy, Field Army, East India Company) taken under arms following the resumption of hostilities, these prisoners formed microcosms of British society abroad. As 'first-class captives', they recreated a home-away-from-home, with their wives, children and servants, and were eager to maintain the link with the mother country through the creation of a transnational charity network, supporting patriotism, religious obedience and socio-professional hierarchies amongst them.

Yet, the return of these prisoners in Britain, after a decade spent in contact with the Gallic 'Other', proved problematic. Drawing on the press and narratives of captivity, this paper will reflect on the perception of this captive diaspora at home. I will argue that captivity crystallised societal dynamics affecting Britain at a pivotal moment of nation-building. The reception of narratives of captivity in the British Isles offers a unique insight into representations of war and the unequal reintegration of these anti-heroes, who, though defeated, presented themselves as 'free-born Britons' returning to a victorious Britain.