

Challenging 1945 as a 'caesura'. New perspectives on transitions, continuity and change in Italy and beyond

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The workshop took place at the premises of the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology, which likewise funded and promoted the scholarly exchange. Young researchers from German, Italian, French and Scottish universities discussed aspects of their research that were thematically and / or temporally connected to the topic. '1945' was understood both as the very year and as a cipher for processes connected to it (such as the end of World War II; postwar; beginning of the Cold War).

As highlighted in the introductory remarks by the workshop organizers STEFAN LAFFIN (Bielefeld) and TERESA MALICE (Bielefeld), '1945' is to be seen as a decisive experience and set piece of the international historiography of the 20th century and in many respects as epoch-making. Nevertheless, while the abrupt caesura and the concomitant radical changes undoubtedly need to be considered in research on the 1940s and 1950s, historians have equally been interested in continuities, lasting legacies such as surviving institutions and in attitudes, *Habitus* or *Lebensstil* that outlived 1945. In this regard, the strong dichotomy between the *before* and the *after* – as established and reasonable as it might be – has obscured some of these developments and processes. This has been particularly true in the case of Italy, where a limited amount of studies has emphasized such continuities.

Proceeding from these considerations, HEINZ-GERHARD HAUPT (Florence) offered a common theoretical and methodological base to bind the papers together

with his keynote. First, he alluded to various historiographical streams and developments, with special attention to the French and German cases (Fernand Braudel, *Annales*-school, *Sozialgeschichte*), outlining the ways in which they had emphasized the study of caesurae in the two national cases. After pointing out their value, for instance, in shaping historiographical concepts and in doing political history, Haupt focused on the circumstances in which watersheds can occur on other levels of interpretation. By doing so, he observed that 1945 may become more obscure and be less distinct when looking at breaking points on the individual level (thoughts, personal expectations, life narratives) or on the local level (for example micro-historical experiences). Similarly, different nation-states may have diverse points of view on a certain watershed. In short, the analytical angle and the disciplinary choice both prefigure the interpretation. Conclusively, Haupt also made clear that caesurae are always constructed under specific conditions and contingencies.

The first panel developed these thoughts further. FRANCESCO LEONE (Trier) referred to the Italian historiography and proposed a periodization whose central point is not necessarily placed at the end of World War II but considers the multiple fractures of the 1940s. By focusing on the fields of political and institutional history and on a history of the political parties, he emphasized the end of the war as a process and proposed some theoretical reflections on the nexus among public memory and historiography. This last point was also touched upon by NICOLA CACCIA-TORE (Glasgow) through the presentation of an empirical case. Taking the relations between British forces and Italian partisans between 1943 and 1945 into account, he suggested an analysis of the soldiers' behavior and propaganda in Italy which could yield new results. As a consequence, Cacciatore explored the possibility of the establishment of other caesurae for the Italian theater of war.

The presentations of the second panel also reasoned from an empirical point of view. They engaged with new research paths in the frame of transitional justice, social policies in the immediate postwar period as well as with Italian sport and its institutional organi-

zation. All the contributions highlighted the transitory character of 1945, where continuities could often be shown. At the same time, in all mentioned fields, the involved institutional actors negotiated their understandings of realignments or discussed whether any realignment was necessary after all. GRETA FEDELE (Bologna / Paris) talked about the judicial procedures for the persecution of former partisans in France and Italy. She stressed the partisan's oscillation between celebratory rhetoric and challenges of legitimacy, concluding that personal experiences connected to violence surrounding the liberation make it hard to see 1945 as a turning point. France and Italy have also been the case studies of GIACOMO CANEPA (Pisa / Paris), who used an institutional-historical approach, comparing the two universalist welfare state systems and the actions of postwar policy makers in the field of social security. He highlighted in particular the constitutional principles and the political views on social assistance. ENRICO LANDONI (Milan) focused on institutions by means of highlighting the sector of sport. Looking at the case of the Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano (CONI), he showed how immediately after the liberation sport values were seen as a political instrument for a national rebirth. Nevertheless, in the long-term the institutional line which prevailed within the CONI was one of continuity with the regime.

The third panel dealt with narratives that attributed meaning to 1945 retrospectively. It also led to broader reflections which went beyond the Italian cases and took the German context into account as well. KERSTIN SCHULTE (Bielefeld) introduced the example of postwar internment camps. The narratives of former Nazis imprisoned in the camps facilitated their integration into the (West-)German postwar society and thus built bridges beyond 1945. Meanwhile, 1945 was also seen as a caesura: Schulte argued that the accomplishment of the 'people's community' (*Volksgemeinschaft*) during Nazi times happened right inside these reeducational camps, yet in the different form of a 'community of suffering' (*Leidensgemeinschaft*). ALFREDO MIGNINI (Bologna) and ENRICO PONTIERI (Bologna) focused on a completely different

ideological context. In their paper, the individual turning point in the life of the Italian communist partisan Otello Palmieri was found to be rather connected with the numerous raids by the *Wehrmacht* in Bologna than with the end of the war itself. They were able to show how a different chronology could be built out of personal perceptions and Palmieri's sticking to the idea of a communist revolution even in the communist party's postwar normalization process. DANIELE TORO (Bielefeld) examined the story of the „Stahlhelm“, an extreme right nationalist organization that tried to make use of the 1945 caesura to render a new beginning possible for itself. By means of a historical and political decontextualization, which was reinforced by a comparison with the much more radical NSDAP, Toro showed how the organization could survive in the postwar German Federal Republic.

All the presentations equally mentioned the open, sometimes intentional construction of 1945. In the end, it was obvious that this year signified a caesura, a notion that was shared by all participants. At the same time, it was highlighted on several occasions that a further investigation and interpretation should not stop at the establishment and maintenance of the watershed. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt's reflections were also recalled in the final discussion: it always needs to be considered to what extent the use of a particular historiographical perspective, and its application to the single cases and the dimensions of individual, local and national levels can hold up, or potentially modify or challenge, the interpretation of 1945 and thereby deconstruct the „majestic and illusory unicity“¹ which has so far dominated Italian postwar studies.

Conference Overview:

Keynote

Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (Florence): Is 'Caesura' a Useful Category of Historical Analysis?

Panel I: Historiography and Legacies

Chair: Thomas Welskopp (Bielefeld)

Francesco Leone (Trier): A Periodization Transcending 1945? Italian Historiography

¹ Federico Romero, *Il 1945 come spartiacque*, in: *Contemporanea* 9, 2 (2006), pp. 319–322.

and the Years 1943-1948

Nicola Cacciatore (Glasgow): Prejudice, Legacy, Continuity: Historiography and the Complicated Relationship between Italian Anti-Fascists and British Forces

Panel II: Empirical Touchstones for Transitional Processes: Italian Case Studies

Chair: Kalle Pihlainen (Turku)

Greta Fedele (Bologna / Paris): The Trials of Partisans: A Comparative Study on Transnational Justice (1944-1954)

Giacomo Canepa (Pisa / Paris): Recasting Public Assistance in Postwar Italy: Continuities and Discontinuities of Italian Social Rights

Enrico Landoni (Milan): The 1945s of Italian Sport and the Final Defeat of Nenni's „Vento del Nord“

Panel III: Making Sense of 1945: Narratives, Networks, Communities

Chair: Stefan Laffin (Bielefeld)

Kerstin Schulte (Bielefeld): Constructing the „People's Community“ Behind Barbed Wire. Narratives of Community in Allied Internment Camps in Post-War West Germany

Alfredo Mignini / Enrico Pontieri (Bologna): There is No Such Thing as Postwar. Life and Memories of Otello Palmieri Before and After 1945

Daniele Toro (Bielefeld): Joining the Behemoth, Overcoming its Downfall: Watershed Narratives by Former Stahlhelm Members in Postwar West Germany

Final discussion and concluding remarks

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