Continuation

Professor Heinz-Gerhard Haupt emphasized the value of caesurae through an intensive immersion in the French and German historiography (Fernand Braudel, Annales, Historische Sozialwissenschaft, etc.). At the same time, he explored the possibility of collocating them differently. Besides the centrality of 1945, he highlighted that watersheds on other levels, such as the individual or the biographical ones, could be different and clung to various moments. The same is true, for instance, for local or institutional dimensions as well as for different national-based narrations.

The first panel further developed these thoughts, with reference to Italian historiography and the proposal of a periodization which central point is not necessarily placed at the end of WWII but considers the multiple fractures of the 1940s (Francesco Leone). It hence made a case for taking indeed various periodizations into account and emphasized how much Italian history in these years experienced ruptures and many different caesurae. These reflections were followed by the presentation of an empirical case, which took the relations between British units and Italian partisans into account. By looking at this, Nicola Cacciatore showed that the possibility of the establishment of other caesurae is conceivable for the Italian theater of war. The relation, and cooperation, between the British forces and the Italian partisans opens up perspectives that at times fit into the general story of the war, but more often than not also draw attention to histories that run counter to an all too straight interpretation of events.

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 (Greta Fedele), social policies in the immediate postwar period (Giacomo Canepa), as well as with Italian sport and its institutional organization (Enrico Landoni). All the contributions highlighted the transitory character of ‘1945’, whereas often continuities could also 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. While the trials on partisans shed light on an aspect which challenged the immediate post-war period with the constant remembrance of the Second World War, the other two contributions demonstrated by means of an institutional-historical approach how strong certain continuities manifested themselves beyond 1945.
The third panel dealt with narratives that retrospectively attributed meaning to ‘1945’, or in part did not perceive this caesura as such at all. As far as the last case is concerned, especially the remarks of Alfredo Mignini and Enrico Pontieri served as a proof. In their paper, the individual turning point in the life of an Italian communist partisan was rather connected with the numerous raids by the Wehrmacht in Bologna than with the end of the war itself. The example of postwar internment camps presented by Kerstin Schulte, however, made clear that such breaks could be found on a completely different ideological side too. The narratives of the former Nazis imprisoned in the camps built bridges beyond 1945 and thus facilitated an integration into the (West)German postwar society. Meanwhile, 1945 was also seen as a caesura, since Schulte argued that the accomplishment of the “people’s community” (Volksgemeinschaft) during Nazi times happened right inside the postwar camps, but in the different form of a Leidensgemeinschaft (“community of suffering”). Finally, Daniele Toro examined the story of the Stahlhelm, an extreme right nationalist organization which 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 Federal Republic.

The last panel was able to bring a valuable contribution, insofar as it went beyond the Italian cases and partly took the German context into account too. However, all the presentations equally mentioned the open, sometimes intentional construction of 1945. That this year signified a caesura was clear and shared by all participants in the end. At the same time, the investigation and interpretation should not stop at the establishment and maintenance of this caesura. Rather – as it was emphasized in the final discussion – it needs to be considered in what ways a particular historiographical perspective, the application to single cases and the dimensions of the individual, local and national levels hold up, challenge or potentially modify, the interpretation of 1945.

About the authors

Stefan Laffin is a historian and doctoral researcher at the BGHS. His doctoral project “Penetration and Replacement of Political Spaces in Italy after 1943” deals with the question, how groups like the mafie and the partisans served as quasi-government actors after 1943 and how the USA dealt with these groups.

His BGHS profile
His E-Mail: stefan.laffin@uni-bielefeld.de

Teresa Malice, also historian and doctoral researcher at the BGHS, deals in her doctoral project “The Italian Left and the German Democratic Republic. Trans-local contacts, entangled views and reciprocal imaginations during the Cold War (1960s-1970s)” with town-twinnings between cities of Italy and the GDR and how they influenced the local policies.

Her BGHS profile
Her E-Mail: teresamalice@gmail.com