

TYPES of assaults and killings

The violence perpetrated against civilians and unarmed partisans by units of armed German soldiers and republican fascists marked the Italian history and its geography between summer 1943 and spring 1945. The more than 5,000-recorded violent episodes, affected heavily several communities through extremely varied forms of massacre-oriented violence.

The killing modes changed according to the situation, the geographical setting, the decision to display or to hide the corpses, its bureaucratic or wholesale nature.

However, the analysed episodes show almost always some level of “targeted functionality”: massacres never looked as accidental events resulting from uncontrolled military power. On the contrary, in the vast majority of cases they were not only legitimized by a command structure geared to counteracting guerrilla activities but they also aimed at hitting strategic military goals that both the German army and the Italian Social Republic troops wanted to target in that ever-changing patchwork that was Italy at that time, mixing up the Italian campaign, the German occupation, the fight against the partisans and the civil war.

In order to express and classify at best the wide range of killing modes, the scientific committee drew a list of definitions in particular considering the violence perpetrated against civilians. Here follows the list of definitions, which were written by drawing on previous similar attempts published in the most recent historiographical literature in the field.

1. Assaults and killings in relation with the armistice and the occupation of Italy

Assaults and killings executed when the German troops occupied the Italian territory the day after the Armistice.

2. Systematic assaults

Assaults and killings perpetrated as retaliation or armed actions executed either by partisans or civilians but also to respond to rebellions and insurrections. Here the action/repression connection is clear and specifically set in space and time.

3. Roundups

Assaults and killings perpetrated during actions against the partisans, usually commanded from the top and based on anti-guerrilla ideas.

4. Assaults and killings for territorial control

Assaults and killings perpetrated during patrolling or looting activities or to punish acts of disobedience. These were ordinary forms of violence, typical of the occupational context.

5. Punitive assaults and killings

Ordered executions and killings of anti-fascists, partisans and suspects already in prison (with or without death sentence) or assaults and killings executed during targeted punitive actions.

6. Assaults and killings in relation to actions of cleansing and desertification

Assaults and killings aimed at emptying areas that were located right behind the fighting lines or close to defensive lines or other strategic goals.

7. Racial assaults and killings

Assaults and killings perpetrated against the Jews.

8. Gender-related assaults and violence

Rapes and assaults perpetrated after rapes or attempted rapes on women. Any information about episodes of violence against women is reported in a special Note.

9. Withdrawal-related assaults and killings

Assaults perpetrated during transfer operations and close to the front, usually executed not

later than 24/48 hours after the liberation of the same area by the allied troops.

10. Eliminationist assaults

Roundups against partisans or “cleansing” military operations that usually combined a strategic goal with the will to exterminate an entire community, including women and children. These assaults resulted in the extermination of entire communities of civilians or alternatively of entire groups of prisoners.

11. Undefined

Episodes with insufficient data, impossible to classify.