

Holocaust Remembrance Day in Spain and the Franco Question

Presenter: Alejandro Baer

Since 2005, Spain has officially held Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies on January 27 under the name “Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and Crimes against Humanity.” Spain’s joining the IHRA initiative occurs in parallel to the emergence of intense public debates that broke the shroud of silence surrounding the violence perpetrated during the civil war and the Franco dictatorship (1936-1939). Holocaust remembrance has entered Spain from the top down in the form of global and European initiatives of commemoration and education, and it interacts both in conflicting and supporting ways with the grassroots memory movement in its reevaluation of the civil war and the Franco regime.

My paper discusses the extent to which remembrance of the Holocaust provided an impetus to interrogate critically the Francoist past, and whether the ceremony itself is permeable to the claims of different mnemonic entrepreneurs. I argue that Spain manages to have a stake in cosmopolitanization through looking back to a distant past (expulsion from Sepharad) and embracing a European memorial ethos. While the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 is remembered during HRD, the Francoist regime—a dictatorship friendly with the axis powers during World War II—is mostly avoided. The diachronic analysis of speeches shows, however, that Francoism is not a taboo topic in more recent HRDs. The globalizing Holocaust discourse is progressively opening up a long-closed space to rearticulate the calls for acknowledgment, and the transnational discourse has started to interact productively with demands that exists at the local level.