

CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST
& GENOCIDE STUDIES

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies News

From the Director

Camus' Lesson

In the wake of the COVID19 outbreak, we are confronted with a globally massive threat to our health, where unparalleled measures are being proposed and enacted to counter it. We are chronicling in real-time the heroic actions of those in the field who are putting their lives on the line to make a difference coupled with heartbreaking stories of loss, separation, and suffering.



Medical personnel on the frontlines of this pandemic in my home country Spain are succumbing to illness at an astonishing rate (Nurses in Madrid pictured). Currently, Spain is hobbled with the highest COVID19 caseload in all of Europe and reportedly ranks only behind the United States worldwide in terms of sheer numbers of those infected.

The legendary Nobel laureate Albert Camus had extensively researched the "Black Death" and other diseases that had ravaged nations and empires throughout history. He looked at examples in Europe and China. However, his research was also intimately informed by the typhus outbreaks in his own Algeria. His masterpiece *The Plague*, in his biographer Alice Kaplan's words, "was inspired by the 1940s—i.e., by the Nazi Occupation. *The Plague* used the story of a city beset by disease to express a vision beyond the absurd: the possibility of solidarity in the struggle against evil, the power of friendship and community."

The text serves as a reminder of what is at stake and how our democracies might be altered when we emerge from this crisis. Camus' novel was above all a response to how European societies reacted when suddenly faced with such a seemingly unstoppable force at their doorstep. The story has been read as an allegory about the reactions of the French people during WWII, ranging from those who collaborated with the Nazi regime to those that courageously decided to resist.

Camus' underlying message is always relevant but even more so at a time of a global



emergency when populations' fears and anxieties are exploited by leaders who seize the opportunity to weaken democratic institutions that serve as a check to their power. That liberty violations occur in the face of security threats (whether real or imagined) is not new and the

German Reichstag (Parliament) fire of 1933 should serve as an unmistakable lesson drawn from the past. Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán (pictured), is now governing by decree, without a predictable deadline to the state's declared state of emergency. Orbán's party was also able to get a law approved in the Parliament under the guise of combating misinformation, opening the door to the persecution of dissenting journalists. Over the last few weeks, Vladimir Putin has planted Russian cities with thousands of new surveillance cameras. Will these be removed once the pandemic is defeated?

It goes without saying that not only fragile and emerging democracies, such as those in Eastern Europe, are destabilized by the added threat of an authoritarian drift in the wake of the COVID19 crisis. A recent **survey** showed that a sizable number of US citizens are willing to consider truncating core civil liberties if it serves to fight this health emergency. For instance, more than 85% polled would consent to ban noncitizens from entering the country and 78% to conscripting health-care professionals to work despite risks to their health.

Camus understood that unchecked, unquestioned power would spiral out of control like a vicious plague leaving people with no defenses to fight against it. Reading Camus in the times of the present global pandemic teaches us a precious lesson: to be alert and prepared to stand with and up for scientists looking for a cure, for our medical professionals treating the sick, and for the well-being of every person. We should also not lose sight of our support for democratic principles based on compassion and reason over narrow national divisions, xenophobia, and the temptation of authoritarian solutions.

In Spain, a popular tune from the 80s is being revived by confined residents who sing it from apartment balconies and windows: *Resistiré* (I will resist). It captures the mood of a nation besieged.

Please stay healthy, informed, and engaged.

Chag Pesach Sameach, Happy Easter, and Ramadan Kareem,

Alejandro Baer
Stephen C. Feinstein Chair and Director

From the Blog

Anti-semantics and Antisemitics

Millions upon millions of people have been killed in concentration camps over the last century, and yet I have found myself distracted and angered about recent political debate



over semantics: specifically how and when we use the term “concentration camps.”

Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez referred to the US government facilities used to hold asylum-seekers as “concentration camps.” Prominent voices publically disagreed with Ocasio-Cortez, saying that only Nazi camps are concentration camps. By using the term for other camps, they said that Ocasio-Cortez dishonored Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

[Read more](#)

Upcoming Workshop: Remote Fieldwork During a Pandemic



Tuesday, April 14
11:30 am
via [Zoom \(Click here\)](#)

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, many students and faculty have been forced to return from the field and will not be able to conduct in-presence interviews or ethnographic work for the foreseeable future. Many others are facing indefinite delays to begin their work. What now? In this special session of the HGMV workshop, we will discuss challenges and opportunities for remote research like Zoom interviewing, 'cyber-ethnography' and 'participant webservation.'

Please join us in this critical conversation.

Presentation by [Francisco Ferrándiz](#) (Professor of Social Anthropology, Spanish Research Council) and author *Contemporary Ethnographies Moorings, Methods, and Keys for the Future* (Routledge 2020)

Response from George Dalbo (PhD student Curriculum & Instruction & CHGS Education Outreach Coordinator)

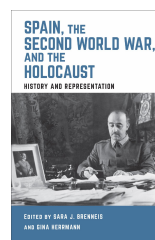
Support University Students

By donating to the Student Emergency Fund, you're providing food to students facing food insecurity. You're covering rent and tuition payments for students experiencing wage losses. And for all of the students benefiting from your gifts, you're reducing feelings of anxiety and fear about how they'll weather this pandemic while making progress toward their degrees.

[Give today](#)

Featured Resource

Spain, the Second World War, and the Holocaust: History and Representation



Edited by Sara J. Brenneis and Gina Herrmann

Including a chapter by
CHGS Director, Alejandro Baer

[Learn more](#)

The Genocide Education Outreach Project

The Center's GEO program, [Genocide Education Outreach](#), is taking knowledge and expertise directly to classrooms across the state.

CHGS Annual Report

The [CHGS Annual Report](#) features our Dakota Narratives Research project and a review of last year's public lectures, partnerships, faculty accomplishments, and opportunities for graduate students and educators.

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