

Daniel Stahl, Hunt for Nazis. South America's Dictatorships and the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes, Amsterdam (Amsterdam University Press) 2018, 375 p. (NIOD Studies on War, Holocaust, and Genocide, 6), ISBN 978-94-6298-521-6, EUR 90,00.

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Daniel Stahl's German-language study of South American responses to the hunt for Nazi war criminals earned well-deserved praise and the Opus Primum award of the Volkswagen Foundation in 2013. Stahl updates this English translation with recent works on Nazi fugitives in South America. The study details the cases of the six fugitives brought to justice – Adolf Eichmann, Franz Stangl, Klaus Barbie, Josef Schwammberger, Erich Priebke, and Dinko Šakić – and other fugitives that slipped away, such as Josef Mengele and Walther Rauff.

Building from previous research on the organizations and methods that enabled Nazi war criminals to escape Europe¹, Stahl contributes a transnational political study that explains why the »hunt for Nazis« in South America was largely a failure for fifty years. His study reveals not only the efforts made and obstacles encountered by those seeking to locate and extradite Nazi fugitives from Argentina, Chile, Paraguay or Bolivia, but how the narrative of the »hunt for Nazis« interacted with domestic and international politics in Europe, South America, Israel, and the United States. Most notably, Stahl argues that the reason why the search for fugitives in South America was not simply »an act of legal assistance between nations« was due to a »transatlantic link in the debates about repression and state-sanctioned violence« (p. 16).

The work is divided into four sections, the first concerning the purported »Fourth Reich« in 1940s and 1950s Argentina. Even before the end of the Second World War, Perón's government fell under suspicion for harboring escaping Nazis and their stolen riches. Stahl reveals how American intelligence and diplomatic services, rather than focusing exclusively on search and extradition, collaborated with Argentinian opposition parties to use the narrative of a Fourth Reich to weaken the government. Indeed, Perón provided a safe haven for many Nazis, if not their mythical gold. Some historians cite a desire for armaments and industry experts as Perón's motivation, but Stahl adds an ideological factor. Perón adhered to the fascist »animosity toward capitalism and communism«, and thereby »actively approved« of their evasion of justice (p. 47).



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¹ Gerald Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run. How Hitler's Henchmen Fled Justice*, Oxford 2011.

The second section covers the changes in attitudes toward Nazi crimes during the 1960s, focusing on increased West German efforts to track down fugitives and the development of the Holocaust as a constitutive element of Jewish identity. Stahl shows how Eichmann's capture and trial in Jerusalem spurred West Germany to increase its efforts in South America for at least a couple of reasons. First, the press coverage of the Eichmann case (and Nazi hunters such as Simon Wiesenthal) portrayed him as a key figure in a nascent Fourth Reich, representing not just a henchman of the recent past but a genuine threat to present world peace. Second, West Germany needed to address criticism for how it was dealing with its Nazi past. This spurred »frantic activities and investigations« into other Nazis in South America and renewed efforts to create an extradition treaty with Argentina (p. 114).

The activities of Fritz Bauer, head of the Frankfurt prosecutor's office, are indicative of the contemporary political and legal environment facing those seeking to apprehend Nazi fugitives. After learning of Eichmann's whereabouts in the late 1950s, Bauer was likely advised by the German Justice Ministry against filing an extradition request due to past failures (p. 102). However, during and after the Eichmann case, Bauer received information directly from German journalists about Josef Mengele residing in Paraguay. Bauer was successful this time in spurring the West German Justice and Foreign Ministries to take meaningful action. He also provided information about the manhunt in Paraguay to a West German press that was eager to report on the »scandalous nature of unpunished Nazi crimes« (p. 141).

Alas, as Stahl shows, pressure from the West German government and media had the counter effect of causing Paraguay to back away from cooperating, thereby preventing Mengele's extradition. Stahl explains how the rise of transnational human rights activism in the 1970s linked the ongoing hunt for Nazi fugitives to political protests against South American military dictatorships. The capture in Bolivia of Klaus Barbie, the former head of the Security Service's Security Police (Sipo-SD) in Lyon, strengthened the connections between the crimes of the Nazis and the oppression of South American authoritarian governments. Barbie reportedly advised Hugo Banzer's dictatorial government on interrogation and torture techniques.

Nazi hunters and human rights activists now had a common cause in South America, and it was only strengthened by a growth in international Holocaust remembrance in the 1970s and 1980s. Nazi hunting and human rights activism were necessary but insufficient to bring Nazi criminals to trial. Once again, international politics had to be in concert with efforts at justice. Stahl explains that Barbie's extradition occurred in 1983 after a center-left government took power in Bolivia, and the deportation was »part of efforts to secure the transition to democracy« (p. 244). More often, such a confluence of activism and favorable politics would come too late, such as in the case of Joseph Mengele.

In the 1990s, the election of the Perónist government of Carlos Menem led Argentina to confront Perón's past role in providing a safe haven for Nazi fugitives. Stahl reveals that the legacy of the perceived Fourth Reich, and particularly of smuggled riches, led



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to parallel and contradictory policies. For state perpetrators in Argentina's own dictatorial past, the Menem government pursued amnesty. For Nazi criminals still harboring in their country, the Menem government pursued them. These efforts resulted in a Historical Commission, opened archives, and three extraditions: Schwammberger, Priebke, and Šakić. Stahl reveals once more how the hunt for Nazis affected Argentinian governance, as the »primacy of international law« as argued in the extradition verdicts justified the arrest of a former junta president (p. 299).

Looking at the cover of the book, this reviewer laments how the text does not focus on the faceless informers or anonymous activists such as the woman holding the protest sign against Stroessner's Paraguayan government. Indeed, these countless individuals affected the hunt for Nazis a great deal, perhaps as much as the key figures whom Stahl analyzes so well. This mild critique aside, Stahl delivers a sweeping narrative of fifty years of frustrated post-war justice hampered by international politics and national self-interest. His exhaustive research of relevant European and South American archives informs a convincing argument for why such extensive efforts to hunt Nazis in South America netted only six.



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