

Nationalism, Sovereignty, and Anti-Semitism. Representations and Consequences of the ‘Eichmann affaire’ in Argentina (1960-1965)

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Introduction: project presentation

As is very well-known, a great number of Nazis and collaborators found refuge in Argentina after the end of WWII (Meding, 2000; Camarasa, 2012). That is the case of, for example, Josef Mengele, Hans Rudel, Willem Sassen, Erich Priebke and, of course, Adolf Eichmann, known as the architect of the so-called “Final Solution”. In May 1960, he was captured by a Mossad command in the outskirts of Buenos Aires, where he was living with his family. After ten days in captivity, he was clandestinely taken to Jerusalem to stand trial.

The Eichmann case is crucial for the history of the Shoah and global anti-Semitism, as it links the history of the tremendous genocide of Jews and its memory: it is a turning point for the necessary making of justice. The trial –which took place at Beit Ha'am and lasted from 11th April to 15th August 1961– was broadcast internationally, and generated a ‘global media event’ (Lindeperg & Wieviorka, 2016). The verdict was unanimous: Eichmann was found guilty of crimes against the Jewish people, crimes against humanity and war crimes; he was therefore sentenced to death. On the night of the 31st May 1962, he was hanged in Ramla prison, being this the first and only execution by the state of Israel. His body was cremated on the spot, and his ashes scattered in the Mediterranean, outside Israeli territorial waters.

However, this project is neither about Nazis in Argentina nor about the Eichmann case and trial. Instead, I propose to consider the Eichmann affaire as a picture of one of the moments in which anti-Semitism reached its peak in Argentina in the 20th century. I

consider it a perfect point of departure for diving into the extremely complex question of anti-Semitism in Argentina's modern history, during the Cold War.

The initial questions that lead my research project are the following: How was the Eichmann affair approached by the Argentine national press, the local Jewish community press, and the extreme right-wing nationalist groups? What similarities and differences can we find between their approaches? What were the reactions of the nationalist activists to the capture and execution of Eichmann? And finally, what were the reactions of the Argentine state and how did they affect the bilateral relations between Argentina and Israel?

As starting hypotheses, I affirm that, while the newspapers of the Jewish community in Argentina supported the Israeli intervention and the verdict of the civil court of Jerusalem, the nationalist movements and circles strongly rejected them, claiming the supremacy of national sovereignty. At the same time, I argue that the Argentine press had oscillating positions between condemning the actions of the "architect of the final solution" and defending national sovereignty. For the same reason, on the side of the Argentine state, the capture of Eichmann was strongly condemned and this, in the short term, negatively affected the relations between the Argentine and Israeli states. Furthermore, various existing nationalist movements reacted to defend the war criminal and committed numerous attacks against the Jewish community.

The general objective of this research is to reconstruct the representations and consequences in Argentina of the capture and execution of Adolf Eichmann. More specifically, I analyse the national newspaper coverage, as well as the way in which the Jewish community press dealt with the issue. Besides, I examine the discourses elaborated by different Argentine nationalist organisations in their press and bulletins, and I establish comparisons between these approaches.

Moreover, I study the reactions of said nationalist groups to the events, which consisted in a great number of attacks to the local Jewish community. The last specific objective of this research aims to tackle the short-term reactions of the Argentine state, and their effects in the international relations between Argentina and Israel. The capture of

Eichmann by Israeli forces was seen as a violation of national sovereignty, and it generated an enormous diplomatic crisis between the two states, which was even taken to the United Nations.

In order to tackle these issues, I resort to a lot of sources: As regards the Argentine national press, I consider several publications, such as *La Nación*, *Clarín*, *La Razón*, *Panorama*, *Crónica* and *Así*. There are also some newspapers of the Jewish community press available for consultation in different archives, for instance, *Mundo Israelita*, *Nueva Sión* and *La Luz*, all of which are considered in this research.

Besides, I analyse nationalist press, taking into account publications such as *Azul y Blanco*, *Segunda República*, *Criterio* and *Dinámica Social*. Nationalist Argentine movements, like the *Movimiento Nacionalista Tacuara* (MNT) and the *Guardia Restauradora Nacionalista* (GRN), produced several bulletins, which are also examined as sources.

Moreover, the archives of various Jewish institutions in Argentina situated in Buenos Aires are explored. One is the *Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas* (DAIA), within which the *Centro de Estudios Sociales* operates. The second one to be considered is the *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina* (AMIA), which hosts the *Centro de Documentación e Información sobre Judaísmo Argentino Marc Turkow*. Also, the archives of the federation *Idisher Cultur Farband* (ICUF), the *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* and the *Fundación IWO, Instituto Judío de Investigación* will be examined. Lastly, I consider the diplomatic documents held at the Archives of the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Next, I will present some of the advances of my research, which is a work in progress. I will focus on the anti-Semitic attacks that took place in Buenos Aires in the context of the capture and execution of Adolf Eichmann and on the reactions of the Jewish press, which strongly condemned the violence exercised against the community. These are key elements that I am examining at the moment, that are crucial to answer the research questions raised in my project.

The anti-Semitic waves after Eichmann's capture and execution

Argentina has a long history of anti-Semitism. As Lvovich (2003) states, the roots of anti-Semitism in this country can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century. In those years, the myth of the world Jewish conspiracy had already been installed and 'a large portion of the Catholic world's common sense believed in the existence of a natural association between Jews and socialism, which were thought to be immerse in a common conspiracy destined to combat the Church and obtain Israeli predominance over Argentina and the world' (p. 104). However, it was during the period of greatest growth of Argentine nationalism, in the 1930s, that anti-Semitism, as a fundamental aspect of its ideological repertoire, extended in the country.

Also during the interwar period, the image of the Jews as representative of modern evils and a mortal threat to Western and Christian civilization gained relevance in several Latin American countries, through local nationalisms and the action of the Catholic Church in its fundamentalist version. The various far right-wing groups that were born and were active in the second post-war period in the region were greatly nurtured by these currents.

After Eichmann's capture and execution, which were covered by all the world press, the responses were immediate. The two years between Eichmann's kidnapping in May 1960 and his hanging in June 1962 were among the most difficult for the Jews of Argentina, where waves of anti-Semitism were unleashed. Most of the violent actions were executed by the MNT and the GRN, two of the most prominent extreme right-wing nationalist movements of those times. They often insisted on a classic anti-Semitic argument, that is the supposed divided loyalty' of the Jewish people (Senkman, 1986). In public, they declared to be anti-Zionist, but not anti-Semitic.

The enormous outbreak of anti-Semitism that struck the local community in the beginnings of the 60's consisted mainly of intimidations, beatings, Nazi-related graffiti and vandalism in Jewish houses and institutions (Figure 1). The justification provided by the rioters was the violation of Argentina's national sovereignty by Eichmann's captors and, therefore, the state of Israel.

Apart from these attacks and intimidations, there have been other even more significant and serious assaults. On the 17th August 1960, in the middle of a fight generated by young Tacuara members, a Jewish 14-year-old, Manuel Edgardo Trilnick, was gravely wounded by a gunshot outside the school gates.

Then, in June 1962, a 19-year-old Jewish student, called Graciela Sirota, was brutally attacked. She reported that a group of men, among whom she said she recognised two members of Tacuara, kidnapped her, tortured her, burnt her with cigarettes across her body, and branded a swastika on her chest using a sharp instrument. She was told that it was a revenge for Eichmann. To this day, the incident has not been solved and the individuals responsible for the assault have not been found.



Figure 1. 'Death'. Source: Nueva Sión, July 1960.

A few days after the attack on Sirota, another student was victim of an assault in Buenos Aires. Ricardo D'Alessandro Brodsky, who was of Jewish descent on his mother's side,

was accosted outside his home by four strangers, who beat him and inflicted on his face three wounds in the shape of swastikas (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Ricardo D'Alessandro Brodsky after being attacked by a group of nationalists. Source: Nueva Si3n, June 1962.

In February 1964, a Jewish and communist activist was assassinated in Buenos Aires, in retaliation for the conflict that had occurred in the brewers' union in Rosario five days earlier, during a syndicalist plenary session, in which there was a shoot-out that resulted in two dead among the MNT members and one of the *Juventud Peronista* [Peronist Youth]. A group of *tacuaras* went to Alterman's home. One of them was posing as a postal employee. He handed him a telegram containing the names of the murdered in Rosario, and then shot him. Later, the victim's father received a note containing the following message: 'nobody kills just because; your son was killed because he was a Jewish communist dog... If you are not satisfied, let all the dogs and Jewish exploiters go back to their native Judea' (Senkman, 1986, p. 48).

Following the killing of Alterman, another attack on a young Jewish man took place in Buenos Aires. Andrés Kretz, a 24-year-old Belgian student, was visited by Tacuara activists in his flat while he was away. As *Así* reports, they broke pictures and other objects, stole books and records, left death threats, and painted the walls with swastikas and Tacuara slogans (Figure 3).

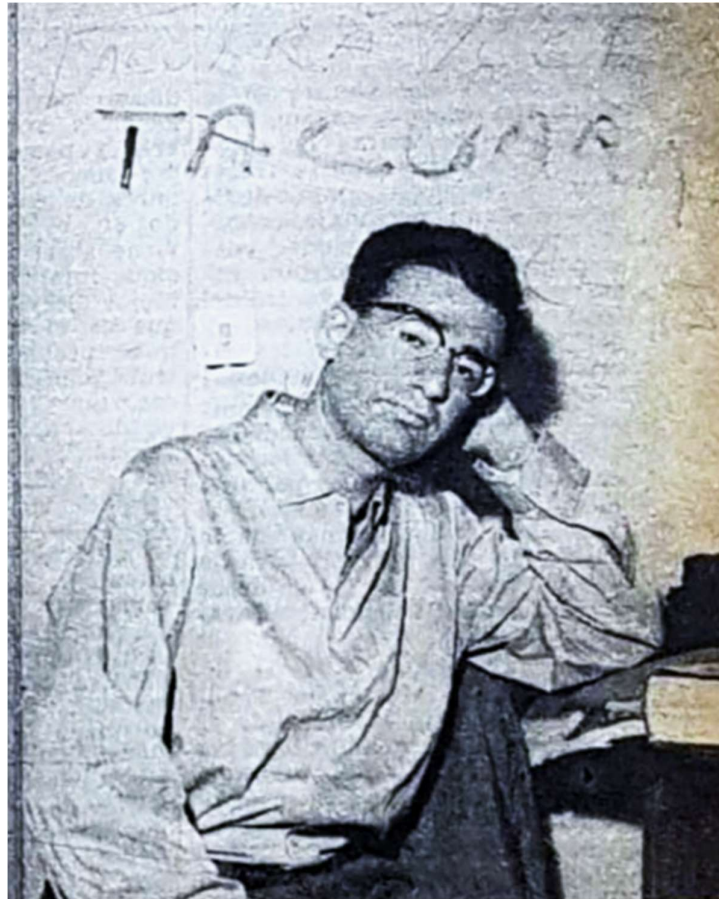


Figure 3. Andrés Kretz in his flat, after the attack. Source: Así, 31st March 1964.

The Jewish community press

The local Jewish community press followed the Eichmann trial very closely. Another important issue that emerges from the analysis of their press is the active militancy against

the wave of anti-Semitism that exploded when Eichmann was captured. In their newspapers, they denounced every attack that occurred in the country in the first years of the 1960s, and they demanded action from the Argentine government. For example, in *La Luz* (15th June 1962), the Jewish community announced that ‘Argentine Judaism is in grave danger’. The DAIA denounced that antisemitism in Argentina ‘is worse than in the most virulent times of Nazism’.

In May 1962, *Mundo Israelita* reported the repeated attacks and insults received by Jewish youths in a school in the Buenos Aires town of San Martín. A memorandum drawn up by the DAIA, which was submitted to the Federal Police, was also a testimony of the attacks suffered by the Jewish community in those years, in which a series of assaults were recorded, together with photographic evidence. According to the same community newspaper, the document contained details of Molotov and tar bombs thrown at synagogues and Jewish schools, as well as inscriptions and graffiti of swastikas in different neighbourhoods of the city of Buenos Aires. The following year, the DAIA issued a public statement declaring a state of alert against outbreaks of racist violence.

Through the press, the community organised a one-day strike to protest the attacks. On 27th June 1962, the strike was announced by the national newspaper *La Nación*. Not only the Chamber of Commerce joined the protest, but also a large part of Argentine society showed their solidarity with the Jewish community. A great number of merchants chose to close their shops to support their claims (Figure 4).

Meanwhile, in the pages of *Mundo Israelita* (30th June 1962), in an article about the strike, it is stated that: ‘the country, indignant, protests the series of anti-Semitic attacks’. Also the newspaper *Nueva Sión* (29th June 1962) reported the initiative: ‘On Thursday afternoon, the dense Jewish neighbourhoods were completely silent. The busy, bustling centres of life came to a feverish halt in a formidable show of solidarity. In mute protest, tens of thousands of posters announced the closure of establishments in repudiation of Nazism’.



Figure 4. Photo caption: 'THE STREETS WERE DESERTED. Thursday's strike was total. Large areas of the city seemed deserted, as the text says. In this way, citizens expressed their protest'. Source: Mundo Israelita, N °2027, 30th June 1962.

Concluding words

This research project tackles the consequences of the Eichmann affaire in Argentina, the country that he chose to escape after the defeat of the Axis in the Second World War, and from which he was taken by force to be judged for his role in the Holocaust. In that context, anti-Semitism, which had been present in the country since the beginnings of the twentieth century, especially among nationalist and Catholic fundamentalist circles, showed its face in tremendous ways.

In this essay, I outlined my current research project funded by the FMS. Also, I presented some of the progress made so far, regarding the anti-Semitic attacks that took place in Buenos Aires in the first half of the 60's, and the local Jewish community reaction, expressed through their press. As shown above, the reconstruction of these events is a crucial step in the realisation of the project.

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