

To Catch a Dictator: The Pursuit and Trial of Hissène Habré

Reed Brody

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Human Rights Watch lawyer Reed Brody's *To Catch a Dictator* is about bringing an elusive criminal to trial for his war crimes.

Hissène Habré's eight-year despotic reign of Chad was marked by political massacres, torture, and rape. Still, he was once backed by the Reagan administration and by the French government, who believed that he'd be a force against Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi. This book establishes the volatile background that caused many to compare Habré to a Chilean dictator, Augusto Pinochet. It also charts the intricacies of Habré's rise to power alongside the experiences of one of his regime's Christian survivors, who vowed to exact justice through activism.

In riveting language, the facts about how Brody assembled the case unfold. The book names setbacks, including because of Belgium's universal jurisdiction law; questions surrounding Habré's extradition; and doubt about Senegal's commitment to holding a trial (Habré had made financial contributions to religious leaders there, and many of his former supporters remained in positions of power in the nation). Because of such barriers, the pages leading up to the trial are suspenseful.

Brody—a white lawyer who entered a fraught situation from the outside—is a humble narrator. He centers the work of his African colleagues in his story of their eighteen-year-long pursuit of justice. He is frank in detailing his personal frustrations throughout. And his book also makes room for compassion, sharing the brutal experiences of some of Habré's victims. There are photographs of torture sites and dangerous encounters, including a grenade attack on a legal team member.

A behind-the-scenes account of a calibrated trial, *To Catch a Dictator* is an incisive story of pursuing justice against a brutal former head of state.

KAREN RIGBY (November / December 2022)

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