

## Nuestra América: My Family in the Vertigo of Translation

**Claudio Lomnitz**

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Claudio Lomnitz explores his family's long, restless history in his memoir *Nuestra América*.

In many ways, Lomnitz grew up isolated from his cultural heritage. He was born in Chile to a Jewish family whose members were either unwilling or unable to teach him about their past. By combining family stories with personal research, Lomnitz reconstructs the travels, struggles, and achievements of his resilient, intellectual forebearers.

The story begins in a Russian border town, Nova Sulitza, where Lomnitz's grandparents grew up before emigrating to Peru. After being exiled by another dictator, they relocated to Colombia to raise their growing family. Lomnitz himself grew up in Chile, the United States, and Mexico. With each succeeding generation, the family became more distant from their ancestors' languages and roots.

Photographs and bits of correspondence are included throughout, allowing a glimpse of the vibrant figures that populate Lomnitz's family tree. Through his family's story, a broader picture of world history and Jewish emigration emerges. Their stories intersect with leftist political movements in 1920s Peru, the Holocaust, the Colombian political unrest known as La Violencia, and Israel's beginnings. The book also delves into painful secrets, like the uncertain fates of several family members. Its use of outdated slurs is a noticeable deviation from its general tone, though.

*Nuestra América* is an intelligent book about a family's struggle to find a home they could call "our America." Lomnitz's parents and grandparents are rendered as bright, ambitious people who learned to bend, not break, in the face of unspeakable hardship. Their story is a timely reminder of the humanity of immigrants, no matter where they come from or where they end up, making *Nuestra América* a riveting family history.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (January / February 2021)

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