



Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge From Nazism

Prof Leo Spitzer

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In the 1930s, many tens of thousands of people fleeing Nazi-dominated Europe found refuge in Latin America. And in the short, terrifying months between the Anschluss and Kristallnacht in 1938 and the outbreak of World War II, Bolivia was one of the few remaining places

- in the entire

world to accept Jewish refugees; more than twenty thousand Central Europeans were soon remaking their lives in this unknown land. Their story was largely overlooked until Leo Spitzer began his pathbreaking work for

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; their extraordinary experiences have never been examined in such touching, memorable detail. But

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is more than a colorful chapter in the history of the Jewish diaspora, and more than another effort to document the life stories, and reclaim the memories, of ordinary people who have been hidden from history. Leo Spitzer—whose Viennese Jewish family arrived in La Paz in 1939 and who lived in Bolivia for almost ten years—is a historian with a special interest in the interdependence of, and tension between, memory and history. With a subtle use of oral-history sources—interviews with survivors who left Bolivia and now live in Israel, the United States, Europe, and elsewhere—and unusual archival illustrations and photographs, he examines the effects of displacement on the experiences of people remaking their lives in a country so strange to them—effects on their European culture and memories, on their Jewish identities, and on Bolivia's politics and society. His beautifully written book is a personal testament to the diverse cultures that shaped him and a haunting consideration of the ways we make meaning out of the cultural baggage we carry with us wherever we go.

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