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# ANTISEMITISM AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE POLITICAL CAREER AND ON THE INTELLECTUAL OEUVRE OF JORGE ISAACS\*

EL ANTISEMITISMO Y SUS EFECTOS EN LA CARRERA POLÍTICA  
Y EN LA OBRA INTELECTUAL DE JORGE ISAACS

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**Abstract:** This essay illustrates the instances of antisemitism and its effects associated with the personal failures in the political career of Jorge Isaacs, whose fight for secular education and ethnic identities challenged the Catholic Church's influence in Colombia. His book *La revolución radical en Antioquia, 1880* denounces the abuses of power during the government of La Regeneración and calls for the liberation of the Sephardic identity of the Antioqueños and the consolidation of the Liberals. Isaacs, a radical Liberal, influenced by Positivism and the confluence of Romanticism with history, attacked the clergy by affirming the Antioqueños's and Indigenous tribes' cultural history in his poem "La tierra de Córdoba" (1890).

**Keywords:** Antisemitism, Radical Liberalism, Clergy, Romanticism and History, Ethnic Identities

**Resumen:** Este trabajo ilustra los efectos del antisemitismo asociados con los fracasos personales en la carrera política de Jorge Isaacs, cuya lucha por la educación laica y las identidades étnicas desafió la influencia de la Iglesia católica en Colombia. Su libro *La revolución radical en Antioquia, 1880*, denuncia el abuso de poder durante el gobierno de La Regeneración y hace un llamado a favor de la liberación de la identidad sefardita de los antioqueños y la consolidación de los liberales. Isaacs, un liberal radical influenciado por el positivismo y la confluencia del Romanticismo con la historia, atacó al clero mediante la afirmación de la historia cultural de los antioqueños y los indígenas en su poema "La tierra de Córdoba" (1890).

**Palabras clave:** Antisemitismo, liberalismo radical, clero, Romanticismo e Historia, identidades étnicas.

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## Introduction

The present essay is divided into four parts. Part one presents the biography of Isaacs and introduces the historical background of Isaacs's political and literary career. From a historical perspective it examines the manner in which Isaacs identified himself with Judaism. Part two demonstrates instances of antisemitic hostility and their harmful effects associated with failures in Isaacs's political career. Part three examines Isaacs's political work *La revolución radical en Antioquia, 1880*, which attests to his struggle to bring about Antioquia's federal autonomy and liberation of Sephardic ethnic identity and to denounce the repression exercised by the government of Miguel Antonio Caro (1892-98) and Rafael Núñez (1880-1882; 1884-1894). Part four illustrates how Isaacs's response to the clergy was influenced by Positivism and the literary practice of Romanticism in confluence with the nineteenth-century Mexican historical novel, as expressed in the poem "La tierra de Córdoba" (1890)<sup>1</sup>. This essay intends to reach two objectives. One is articulating Jorge Isaacs's biography as a matter of historical investment in its own right. The other one is using Isaacs's poem to understand the dynamics of the conflicting cultural context of nineteenth century Colombia, post-colonialism, and the cultural history of the Indigenous tribes and Sephardic conversos.

## 1. Biography of Jorge Isaacs

Jorge Isaacs was born in the state of Cauca, Colombia in 1837 and died in the city of Ibagué in 1895. Isaacs considered himself to be a "hermano de raza de Antioquia," a state whose people and culture he identified as part of the Jewish race. Isaacs was buried in Medellín according to his wishes<sup>2</sup>. Transferring Isaacs's ossuary from Ibagué to Medellín was only possible after a ten year campaign that was initiated by the antioqueños. (Londoño de Franco, 1989, pp. 358, 360). Isaacs's father, Jorge Henríque, immigrated to Jamaica along with many other Jews from Holland. In the state of El Chocó, Colombia, he converted to Catholicism in order to marry his fiancée Manuelita Ferrer (Arciniegas, 1967, pp. 15-16). Isaacs lived during the nationwide struggles between liberals and conservatives and between federalists and nationalists

1 The poem was published in *El Autonomista*, September 10, 1890. (All translations from Spanish are my own.)

2 Isaacs wrote in his will "Si en Ibagué me dan tumba prestada, que pronto envíe Antioquia por mis huesos, a ella pertenecen, que los sepulten en el valle de Medellín o cerca de la tumba de Córdoba" (cited in D. Grajales, 2013, p. 3).

that took place in Colombia during the second half of the nineteenth century. Jorge Isaacs participated in the armed rebellion of 1854 against José María Melo's dictatorship and in 1860 participated in defense of the conservative government of Mariano Ospina Rodríguez, against General Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera. In 1876 he took part in the battle of the Chancos along with the forces of the radical government of Aquileo Parra against the Conservatives (Germán Arciniegas, 1967: 5-8; Mario Carvajal, 1937: 146-147). In 1880 Isaacs proclaimed himself the civil and military head of the radical revolution of Antioquia (Arciniegas, 1967, p. 10). In 1885 during the civil war which lasted nine months Isaacs stayed in the town of Fusagasugá (Arciniegas, 1967, p. 11). During this period four constitutions were enacted: The Radical Constitution of 1853, the Constitution of 1858, the Federal Constitution of Rionegro of 1863, and the Centralist Constitution of President Raphael Núñez of 1886 (supported at the beginning by Radical Liberals).

### **1.1 Historical background of Isaacs's political and literary career**

The political background of this period in Isaacs's life is studied in depth by Paul Oquist. He describes the political environment around the conflicting relations between Church and the Liberals from 1863 to 1890. Oquist states that the Liberal division began when the conservatives decided to conquer power in 1875. Their 'ideological motif' was religion and the war was headed by the clergy. In 1876, the church engaged in pre-revolutionary activity (cited by Oquist, 1980, p. 68). From 1863 to the late 1940s, the church warned that 'Liberalism was a sin' (cited by Oquist, 1980, p. 68). Even though the Radicals won the holy war of 1876-1878, they lost the competition for power with the Independents with whom they had temporarily united. The presidential succession in 1878 of the liberal General Julián Trujillo, who formed a mixed Independent-Radical cabinet but increased the support of the Independents by the Conservatives, destroyed the Radical governments of the Magdalena and Cauca states. The gaining of control of power by the Independents paved the way for the presidential succession in 1880 of the leader of the Independent Liberals Raphael Núñez (cited by Oquist, 1980, pp. 68-69). The Radical-Independent rivalry nearly led the country into a civil war in 1884. By 1885 these conflicts had developed into a nationwide civil war between the Radicals and the Independents (Oquist, 1989, p. 69-70).

Isaacs's involvement in an ambitious cultural project of affirming the Sephardic and Indigenous ethnic identities, secularization, and freedom of

expression was a response to the theocratic approach of the leadership of La Regeneración, a political process driven by the Independent Liberal-Conservative Coalition. It was started by President Rafael Núñez in 1885, and Miguel Antonio Caro, who joined his coalition, helped write the constitution of 1886 (Oquist, 1980, p. 70; Rodríguez García, 2006, pp. 145-146). The new government of La Regeneración annulled the Constitution of Rionegro of 1863, which proclaimed federalism and the separation of church and state, and barred the Radical Liberals from government. In 1866, they drafted a new constitution. Núñez restored the power of the church through the constitution and supplemented it in 1887 with a concordat with the Vatican. The concordat guaranteed the church absolute power over land ownership to compensate for damages inflicted in the “desamortization of mortmain land in 1861” (Oquist, 1980, p. 70). Caro perceived Colombians as homogenously Roman Catholic, and he reacted to Isaacs’s political agenda by attacking his Sephardic ethnicity.

## 1.2 Historical perspective of Isaacs’s ethnic identity

Antisemitism<sup>3</sup> in Colombia contributed to failures in the political career of Jorge Isaacs (1837-1895), an intellectual who did not disguise his Jewish ethnic identity. Isaacs’s ethnic Jewish identity is evident in his final words: when he was asked if he believed in Christ by a priest who remembered Isaacs’s campaign against the clergy, he responded, “El pertenece a mi raza” (cited by Londoño de Franco, 1989, p. 359; Mesa Bernal, 1988, p. 129). His ethnic identity is also evident in his devotion to affirming the historical Jewish ethnicity of the Antioqueños<sup>4</sup>, and is represented as a central theme in his poem “La tierra de Córdoba” (1890), as well as in his book *La revolución radical en Antioquia, 1880*. While there are sources that reject Isaacs’s Sephardic

3 In 1879, Wilhelm Marr both coined and popularized the term (Lacqueur. 2006, p. 21). According to W. Lacqueur, antisemitism was clearly defined as opposing and fighting “semitism”. The term antisemitism appears in the domain of linguistics; however, those who were antisemites did not show much interest in “Akkadian (the oldest Semitic language), Phoenician or Tigrinya, the official language of Eritrea”. They did not display any hostility against Semitic language speakers, such as Hannibal or Jesus. Antisemitism was a “synonym for racial Judeophobia” as opposed to earlier religious hatred against Jews (Lacqueur. 2006, pp. 21-22).

4 Isaacs visited Antioquia in 1879 and lived there for a period of time in 1880. He felt a strong kinship and affinity with the Antioqueños and referred to them as “la gente de mi raza” (Londoño de Franco, 1989, pp. 357-358). See footnote 2 for relevant discussion.

identity<sup>5</sup>, it is noteworthy that Isaacs insisted on defining his Jewish identity as “raza” (race). The term “raza” reflects a Spanish legacy among conversos or New Christians<sup>6</sup>. Marvin Perry and Frederick Schweitzer explain that with the increasing power of the Inquisition and the growth of the concept of “purity of blood” (“limpieza de sangre”), prejudice and discrimination against New Christians existed beyond the usual, based largely on “race”—supposedly genetic traits that set Jews apart from other people— (Perry and Schweitzer, 2008, p. 38). From the thirteenth century until 1860 there was a racial distinction between New Christian and Old Christians in Spain (Perry and Schweitzer, 2008, p. 38). The mission of the Inquisition was to protect the purity of the Christian faith. This allowed the Inquisition to survey the descendants of those conversos or New Christians who had been forced to convert on the wake of the massacres in Spain in 1391, the Spanish Inquisition in 1478, the expulsion of Jews following the decree of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492 and Manuel’s royal decree to convert Jews by force in Portugal in 1497 to make sure that the suspected were no longer following their traditional Jewish beliefs (Perry and Schweitzer, 2008, pp. 34, 38). Benzion Netanyahu states that the problem of whether or not to consider Jews based on their religion or ethnicity was a heated conflict that continued in the Renaissance. The Orthodox rabbis did not recognize the conversos as Jews (cited by B. Netanyahu, 1966, pp. 6-7). However, the Catholic Church and Christian citizens refer them as Jews just as they continue to do so in the New World in Antioquia, Colombia<sup>7</sup>.

Clearly, ethnic Judaism has survived from the time of the Inquisition and it is well documented in a historical context. It is also brought to light

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5 To cite one example, the assumption underlying critical thought on Jorge Isaacs’s novel *María* (1867) in “La cuestión judía” (“The Jewish question”) is based on the assumption that Isaacs’s preoccupation with Judaism was not ethnic, but literary: “Es muy probable que la preocupación de Isaacs por lo judío estuviera apoyada en un propósito diferenciador, aunque no de tipo antropológico sino literario”. (Luis Borges, n. d. Biblioteca Virtual Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango del Banco de la República)

6 M. Perry and F. Schweitzer state that the term conversos or New Christians (and Marranos) applies to Jewish converts to Christianity and their descendants. For a discussion of the multifaceted identity of the conversos see D. M. Gitlitz’ book *Secrecy and Deceit: the Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Gitlitz, 1966, pp. 80-82).

7 See, e. g. Daniel Mesa Bernal (1988, pp. 117-118); Libia Velásquez Vásquez (2014, pp. 174-185).

in literary analyses<sup>8</sup>. Florinda Goldberg, e.g. in the context of her analysis on the New Christian subtext in Isaacs's novel *María*, states that the term "raza" hints to the 'subtle tension of white over white and therefore it is not perceived as such a dramatic threat as in the racial tension between blacks and whites' (cited by Goldberg, 1997, p. 6). The author proceeds to state that "this is based on the fact that in the novel Jewish self-identification is ideologically defined as 'raza' as opposed to Catholicism which is a religion. Race and national origins are not erased through religious conversion, but they turn out to be compatible with Catholicism" (Goldberg, 1997, pp. 6-7). The concept of Judeo-Christian "harmony" is flawed, as Enrique Marini Palmieri suggests in his article "Creación narrativa y sobresemantización en *María*, de Jorge Isaacs". He states that "although Isaacs presents a family, a world, a region in perfect harmony, in Colombia the circumstances were far from being idyllic" (Marini Palmieri, 2000, p. 12). Naïve readers in Isaacs's time romantically understood the story of Ephraín and María; for them "it was as if Isaacs would have taken the story into the core aspects of the heroine's character, indirectly suggesting the image of a harmonious society desired and longed for" (Marini Palmieri, 2000, p. 12). Marini Palmieri recalls the wise words of Eduardo Mallea: "A writer reflects romantically his own time [...] but what makes a genius' perspective eternal is his permanent reality" (cited by Marini Palmieri, 2000, p. 12).

With the onset of Isaacs's leading government positions and his radical liberal ideas about politics, education, and science, he quickly became the target of an abusive antisemitic rhetoric based upon his Jewish ethnicity. This phenomenon calls attention to the tension between Judaism and Catholicism in the history of Colombia.

Antisemitism existed in Antioquia (Colombia) before this time. In the local genealogical historical record of Antioquia, for instance, the rejection of the Sephardic ethnicity of the Antioqueños reflects a medieval legacy of racist divisiveness that was built upon the Catholic monarchy preoccupation with "purity of blood". In his study *Genealogías de Antioquia y Caldas*, and in his article "Orígenes de la raza antioqueña", the genealogist Gabriel Arango Mejía dismissed the idea of a Jewish colonization in the sixteenth century and tried to legitimize instead a Basque genealogical ancestry that

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8 In general writers have focused on quoting verses from the poem for their own objectives. However, this poem has been in part examined by Libia Velásquez Vásquez (2011: 93-113), who is pursuing and completing this analysis.



went back to the seventeenth and eighteenth Basque emigration and was characteristic of “limpieza de sangre” (Mesa Bernal, 1988, p. 82; Patiño Duque, 2007, pp. 284, 358). Mesa Bernal documents that in 1482 and in Guipúzcoa [Álava and Biscay are part of the Basque land], a law was passed that forbade intermarriage with Jews or settlements of Israelites; King Charles V confirmed this statute and the town of Biscay followed the example (Mesa Bernal, 1988, p. 85). This law was very influential, since it served as the basis for Arango Mejía’s claim that the Antioqueños’ ancestry was to be traced to the seventeenth and eighteenth Basque emigration.

Marvin Perry and Frederick Schweitzer, in the context of their presentation of over ninety documents on antisemitic myths about Jews during generations, state that the practice of inter-marriage between the nobility and rich Jewish families in Spain in the fifteenth century produced a new form of antisemitism. This was more severe than the previous religious antisemitism, since any Jewish ancestry, even an ancestral generation, was considered shameful and legally punishable (Perry and Schweitzer, 2008, p. 30). Jews were considered inferior, and they were required to have a ‘purity of blood’ certificate in order to enter public careers in both the state and the church (Perry and Schweitzer, 2008: 38). Arango Mejía’s rejection of a Jewish colonization in Antioquia has its roots in antisemitism and serves as a cautionary tale, a warning against a possible converso identity<sup>9</sup>.

## **2. Antisemitism associated with failures in Isaacs’s political career**

In many instances Isaacs confronted antisemitic verbal, literary, and even physical attacks from the Catholic society, the clergy and political leaders before and during the government of La Regeneración. Lucía Londoño de Franco states in his biographical study of the Antioqueños and the conversos, known also as Marranos, that in 1866 Isaacs was elected Representative in

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9 On both a national and regional level, Colombian governments sought to eradicate any connection or identification of the Antioqueños with a Jewish ancestry. Eduardo Zuleta states that the archives from El Rosario University (founded in 1653) in Bogotá show the entrance conditions which were in place during many years for students who would later occupy government positions. One of these conditions was “que ni ellos ni sus ascendientes había desempeñado oficio vil ni bajo, es decir el comercio y la usura” and the other one was “que eran limpios de sangre sin mezcla de moros ni judíos” (Zuleta, 1929, p. 19). For a discussion of the deep rooted antisemitism at the local and national level in the Colombian fabric of society, see Libia Velásquez Vásquez (2014, pp. 155-187).



Congress with the support of conservative voters of the state of Valle del Cauca. Between 1869 and 1870 Isaacs worked as secretary of the Chamber of Deputies (Londoño de Franco, 1989, p. 356). Arciniegas in his biography of Isaacs, states that in 1868, Isaacs understood that his vision for a free Colombian society fit more closely with radical liberal ideology, and he joined the opposing party<sup>10</sup>. However, Isaacs's party change caused him to have "enemistades no previstas" who practically shouted at him "Judío!" "y le recuerdan que viene de la raza maldita". Arciniegas adds that Isaacs "románticamente se aleja de esos ruidos, abre su Biblia y se enfrasca en la lectura de Ruth, de Raquel, de Sarah"<sup>11</sup> (Arciniegas, 1967, pp. 37-38).

Lucía Londoño de Franco states that Isaacs not only converted to Liberalism but also had no other alternative than to convert to Freemasonry. In Latin America, during this time Freemasonry advocated for the disassociation of church and state and for the autonomy of public and private life, specifically in the area of public education. However, whenever Isaacs opposed the church he was denounced as an atheist (Londoño de Franco, 1989, p. 356).

From 1876 to 1878, Isaacs served as Superintendent of the Public Instruction and later held the position of Secretary of State and advocated for secular education (Arciniegas, 1967, pp. 8-9). This period of Isaacs's life was characterized by the antagonism of the clergy against the Democratic Societies of the Radicals. The new radical Constitution was anticlerical and aimed at dispossessing the clergy of its enormous wealth. The strong anticlericalism during this period can be compared to the battles of the Reform movement in Mexico (Arciniegas, 1967, p. 54).

As Superintendent, Isaacs saw himself affected by the ecclesiastical authorities' reaction to his quest for the enacting of radical laws on secular education. According to Cristina Z., Isaacs aimed at implementing the Pestalozzi method of education. This caused serious confrontations with

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10 Donnal Macgrady states that Isaacs's change of party is to be explained by a renewed resistance to the Catholic Church (cited by Delpar, 1981, p. 206).

11 Much of the academic effort of Arciniegas (like that of other biographers) is descriptive in nature and centered around the personal attacks that Isaacs had to endure during his public service career. Thus, the authors do not name, identify or interpret antisemitism with pointed criticism because it has been a taboo in Colombian society. As a result, the "phenomenon of antisemitism" in Colombia has all but escaped academic identification and critical inquiry.

the clerical establishments. The Bishop of Popayán, for example, warned parents against registering their children in schools controlled and funded by the government or in the “Normal Superior” (Higher Teacher Training College). He banned the reading of the *Liberal Agenda* and excommunicated “The Escolar” (official body of the Superintendence). In May 1877, a crowd of protesters caused considerable damages in the Superintendence and the “Escuela Normal” (cited by Cristina Z., 1995, n. p.). Isaacs states that “el presbítero Manuel María Rada, enemigo implacable de la educación común, y los señores Nicanor Hurtado, and Francisco Mosquera fueron los que capitanearon la turba salvaje que rompió la oficina de la superintendencia y sus almacenes para destruir el archivo y muchos útiles de la enseñanza” (cited by Arciniegas: 1967, p. 56). Nevertheless, Isaacs went on with his unrelenting work on education as a Representative of the State of Cauca in Congress (cited by Cristina Z., 1995, n. p.).

During this time, Isaacs advocated on behalf of the Indigenous tribes of the Guajira and Magdalena. Arciniegas states that Isaacs was concerned that the authorities in Colombia did not respond to the complaints of the natives who had lost their land and decided to intervene (Arciniegas, 1967, p. 54). Isaacs made the authorities aware of the government’s abuses by demanding the emancipation of the Indigenous tribes: “el partido liberal libertador en toda la nación de los esclavos de raza Africana, hace también libres a la gente de raza indígena. No protegerlas y educarlas sería como ceder, dice, a la presión feudal de que ha sido víctima esa raza” (Arciniegas, 1967, p. 54).

During this period of clerical resistance against the Radicals, Isaacs sustained inflammatory attacks. In the course of Isaacs’s fight to advance the cause of secular education, clerics made false accusations against Isaacs in order to turn Catholic sentiment against him. In his article “El desconocido político Jorge Isaacs”, Luis Otto Morales Benítez cites the letter dated and signed in 1876 in Popayán in which Isaacs explained this hostile situation. Isaacs complained that as Superintendent of Public Instruction he had been slandered for barring the teaching of Christianity in a school in Popayán, which, as a consequence, caused Ms. Emilia Velasco to resign from her position (Morales Benítez, 2007, p. 9). The clergy considered Ms. Velasco’s decision brave and proper. Appalled by the accusation and wanting to personally identify those responsible, Isaacs sent two questions to Ms. Velasco asking if she had received authorization from ‘la resolución número

19 de la Superintendencia , para dar enseñanza de religión católica en el establecimiento que dirige, todos los días no feriados desde las tres de la tarde en adelante?’ ‘¿Antes ó después de esa resolución, dictada en 26 de enero ultimo, ha hecho usted renuncia del empleo de Directora de la escuela que regenta?’ (Morales Benítez, 2007, pp. 10-11). It is evident that Isaacs was affected by the clergy’s vicious tactics and their unfounded accusations. As in militant Spain, the clergy did not tolerate dissent from Catholic dogma, culture, and the Liberals’ influence. Oquist, in the context of his analysis on the violent domestic conflicts in Colombia, states that between 1863 and 1940, the church maintained that “Liberalism was a sin”. The Colombian clergy who met at annual conferences during this period insisted on this point (Oquist, 1989, p. 68).

Isaacs found himself constantly oppressed by deceit and slander from the clergy. Morales Benítez states that negative and ill oriented attitudes prevailed. In 1876 the priest Jose Ignacio Soto condemned Isaacs’s writings that appeared in *El Escolar* and education journals. The priest wrote that “el periódico *El Escolar* que difunde los principios de la educación y las normas que rigen ésta, es lectura ‘corruptora de la doctrina de Jesucrito’, y que ‘es el órgano de que se vale nuestro gobierno opresor y apóstata’” (cited by Morales Benítez, 2007, p. 11).

While Isaacs and his fellow liberals were committed to implementing an effective system of education that would foster scientific progress, President Miguel Antonio Caro aimed at enforcing the ultramontane<sup>12</sup> orthodoxies of the old militant regime of Spain. Rodríguez García, in his article “The Regime of Translation in Miguel Antonio Caro’s Colombia”, states that in 1877, a Concordat was signed encouraging the total control of all aspects of education, including the range of subjects educators were authorized to teach. This would then be enforced by the Archbishop of Bogotá (Rodríguez García, 2004, pp. 153-154). Among the exceptional powers that Caro conferred upon himself was the ability to designate “domestic enemies”, an appellation traditionally accorded to Satan, but imposed in the modern era on Liberalism and Secularism. In these circumstances, Liberals who had been part of the

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12 The *Diccionario de la real academia española* (DRAE), (n. d.) defines the term “ultramontano” as “a supporter or advocate of the highest power and broad authority of the Pope”. The government of La Regeneración was characterized by its ultramontane policies. This entails extreme conservatism based on strict Catholic policies such as church control, hierarchy, and colonialism rather than progressive constitutions.

“lettered city” were now denounced as an “unassimilable extremist minority” under Caro (Rodríguez García, 2004, p. 148). The church’s power in Colombia was considered greater than in the rest of Latin America: “from about 1886 until 1930 (in Colombia) the Conservative party guaranteed the church its reacquired position at a time when its privileges were being substantially modified in the rest of Latin America” (Dix, 1967, p. 307).

As a radical Deputy of the Chamber in 1878 Isaacs fought for his deep liberal convictions. When President Julián Trujillo (1878-1880) asked the Chamber of Deputies to grant revenues to the clergy and to pardon exiled priests who participated in the civil war of 1776, Isaacs strongly debated and defended his opinion. On May 13, 1878 Isaacs fervently opposed President Trujillo: “Yesterday, during the entire session [...] I intensely opposed the debate related to the religious question” (Arciniegas, 1967, p. 9).

There was one instance of antisemitism that escalated to physical violence. Arciniegas makes reference to what became known as the “*lapidación del Congreso*” (stoning of Congress). In 1879 in Bogotá, Conservative representatives and enraged mobs stoned Isaacs along with his companions and liberal congressmen. This eventually led to the dissolution of Congress. The mob chased Isaacs all the way to his residency, once again slanderously crying out against him, “*judío*” (Arciniegas, 1967, pp. 62, 67). Londoño de Franco states that during the attack in Congress, Isaacs was branded as a member of the ‘*raza maldita*’; (‘accursed race’) by one of his opponents (Londoño de Franco, 1989, p. 356). This act of denigration affected Isaacs profoundly, and he began to lose his self-confidence. Isaacs believed his difficulties had been caused by “*prejuicio contra su pasado étnico*”<sup>13</sup> (Londoño de Franco, 1989: 356). It should be noted that the libel of “accursed race” emerged during the Middle Ages among anomalous myths. Jews were blamed for committing deicide. In Spain the racial distinction between conversos and Old Christians lasted until 1860 (Perry & Schweitzer, 2008, p. 38).

## 2.1 Isaacs’s use of Darwinism ignited Caro’s antisemitism

As a result of scientific exploration that began in 1881, Isaacs published in 1884 his first ethnographic studies of the Indigenous tribes of the Guajira

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13 Londoño de Franco states that Isaacs “bien pudo ser el propio culpable de muchas de sus penalidades. Según varios observadores, se daba golpes de pecho al mismo tiempo que rechazaba la intolerancia de sus compatriotas” (1989, p. 356). Here, the author fails to identify that Isaacs’s personal behavior does not justify the antisemitic libel of the ‘*raza maldita*’.

and in some regions of the present-day state of Magdalena in his *Anales de la instrucción pública* (*Annals of Public Instruction*), in a text titled “Las tribus indígenas del Magdalena” (cited by López Jiménez, 2008, p. 79). Isaacs’s ethnographic study of the natives of the Guajira and Magdalena was the product of evolutionist ideas debated within Positivism. An example can be found in Charles Darwin’s ideas presented in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), in which he addresses the question of human evolution, that is, man’s descent from some primal form: “It is notorious that man is constructed on the same general type or model with the other mammals. All the bones in his skeleton can be compared with the corresponding bones in a monkey, bat, or seal... the brain, the most important of all organs, follows the same law” (cited by Farrington, 1996, p. 54).

Darwin’s struggle for a new conception of natural history should be understood in the context of the secularization of education in England at the time. Darwin closely followed the heated debate between Thomas Henry Huxley and Richard Owen and offered them support for trying to remove clerical domination from the scientific establishment. Huxley implied in one of his speeches that he “would rather be related to an ape than a bishop”, creating a sense of grievance among the devoted believers in the church. In response, Owen claimed that the human brain was different from that of apes. Huxley thereafter attacked Owen in his article “Evidence on Man’s Place in Nature” exposing Owen’s arguments as baseless. It seems as though Isaacs used the idea of the “Ape as origin of Man” as a response to fight the clergy in the same manner that Henry Huxley did in England. Huxley struggled to separate religion from science and used Darwinism to campaign against the authority of the clergy in education. In his autobiography Darwin showed his great respect for Huxley’s “well deserved attacks” on scientists who wrote against “the principle of the gradual evolution of organic beings” and for his significant contribution in promoting scientific education in Great Britain (Gavin de Beer, 1983, p. 62-63).

Olga Restrepo Forero and Diego Becerra Ardilla, in the context of their study on the reception of Darwinism in Colombia, observe that Isaacs’s use of Darwinism “resuena como una provocación” (1995, p. 552). Isaacs writes in *Anales de la instrucción pública* (1884): ‘tolerándolo mis lectores muy susceptibles los partidarios de la teoría darwiniana, podríamos suponer que la figura número 12, mitad simia y de rostro muy raro, es representación de la forma que tuvo el animal, terrible como se ve, que precedió al hombre

en la escala del perfeccionamiento' (cited by Restrepo Forero & Becerra Ardilla, 1995, p. 552). The fight of the Radical Liberals was best manifested by Isaacs's position in the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Cauca state (1876-1878) and in his ethnographic studies as compiled in *Anales de la instrucción pública*. Restrepo Forero and Becerra Ardilla state that the ideas concerning struggle for survival and natural selection "forman parte de la doctrina del radicalismo derrotado" (Restrepo Forero and Becerra Ardilla, 1995: 558). López Jiménez dealt with the necessity of analyzing Caro's politicized interpretation of Isaacs's work. According to the author, Isaacs's use of Darwinism served Caro as a pretext to displace Isaacs's text by giving it "un nombre y ponerlo en algún estante de la biblioteca de textos politizados para así garantizar su olvido, o tras una película de polvo or tras la homogenización de sus argumentos" (López Jiménez, 2008, pp. 91-93). Indeed, Caro's objective was to politicize Isaacs's text through classifying it as a scientific text in order to maintain the traditional church's domination. Isaacs and his radical liberal partisans' intent was a commitment to fight the clergy, however, Caro took this also as a pretext to attack Isaacs's Jewish ethnicity to further his political goals.

Isaacs's use of Darwinism ignited Caro's antisemitism based on the familiar medieval accusations of a people cursed, liars and deceivers, capitalists and usurers, and subverters of Christianity. Restrepo Forero and Becerra Ardilla state that flaming rhetoric was publicized in Caro's response to Isaacs's studies in a series of articles he called "El darwinismo y las misiones" (Restrepo Forero and Becerra Ardilla, 1995, p. 552). In these articles Caro strongly criticized Isaacs' writings by presenting Isaacs's use of Darwinism as a menace to Christianity and by attacking Isaacs's Jewish background (Arciniegas, 1967, p. 74-75). Arciniegas states that although "todo parece indicar que venía de la ascendencia judía de los Caros, obraba como aquellos inquisidores que viniendo de la sinagoga al cristinianoismo resultaron más implacables que los cristianos viejos" (Arciniegas, 1967, p. 74). It should be noted that the origin of the surname Caro takes root in the Jewish culture of those Spanish and Portuguese communities who were expelled from Spain by royal decree of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492<sup>14</sup>. This name also takes root in the Judeo-Spanish culture in Constantinople

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14 The name Caro is cited with respect to Jews and conversos or Marranos in 17 bibliographical, documentary, or electronic references. (Name your Roots, Names Analysis Report, n. d).



through Rabbi Yosef Caro, who continued to embrace Judaism (Sarina Roffé, n.d.). Jews in Constantinople were not subjected to political or social pressures of the kind placed on conversos who came to the Indies after the expulsion from Spain in 1492.

## 2.2 Isaacs's ethnographic studies and Caro's antisemitic response

Caro ridiculed Isaacs for his interest in the culture and language of the Guajiros. Caro did not accept that Isaacs used to write "guajira" instead of "goajira" as the priest Celedón had done. He never exonerated Isaacs for not accepting Celedón's ideas in his grammar of the 'idioma goajiro!' and for his sympathy for Darwinism (Arciniegas, 1967, pp. 73-74). Furthermore, Caro 'no podía tolerar que en *Los Anales de la Instrucción Pública* de una nación Cristiana se le hubiese permitido estampar su adhesión a la teoría de Darwin. Pero como además, había de llegar al fondo de la agresión personal, acabó enrostrándole su judaísmo" (cited by Arciniegas, 1967, p. 74-75). Caro valued the individual's submission to a higher authority. This was incompatible with the liberal tradition of critical thinking, which emphasized and advanced the debate of pursuing the objective truth as a means to advancing the human race (Rodríguez García, 2006, p. 165).

Caro's hatred toward Jews was persistently fueled by classic antisemitic myths which condemned Jews for causing the collapse of the local economy where they resided. For example, Arciniegas states that Caro blamed the Jews from Holland who had settled in Curaçao<sup>15</sup> for the region's poverty and found the reasons for it in Eduardo Drummond's *La France Juivre*, in which he described tactics employed by Jews. According to Caro the Jewish settlers in Curaçao were responsible 'por adueñarse del comercio de Rioachacha y con esta llave han monopolizado el de la Guajira explotando a aquellos indígenas sin llevarles en cambio ningún principio de cultura social. ¡Ojalá que los daños que causan esos despiadados traficantes se redujeren a la corrupción del nativo idioma único perjuicio que deplora el señor Isaacs!' (cited by Arciniegas, 1967, p. 75). After the tribulations of the Jews of the Middle Ages had passed, there was little change in the mind of powerful authorities in nineteenth-century Colombia. The real causes of antisemitism continued to be political, economic, and social. Caro believed Isaacs's actions stemmed

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15 The Maduros, Casseresses, Motas, Curiel, and other affluent Jewish merchant families were also engaged in commerce in Curaçao (Charles Gomes Casseres, n. d.).



from a “Jewish conspiracy to conquer and rule the world”<sup>16</sup> and justified his antisemitism by using hate literature.

In his biography on Isaacs, Jaime Mejía Duque states that Caro branded Isaacs’s ethnographic research as materialist and sterile: “El Sr. Isaacs, después de publicar la *María* y sus *Poesías* escritas cuando era espiritualista y creyente, no ha vuelto en veinte años, a escribir ningún libro ni cosa alguna de mérito literario Parece que el materialism le ha esterelizado’ (Mejía Duque, 1979, p. 40). For Caro, this was the result of Isaacs being “‘ateo’ concicto y confeso, dispuesto a dar su vida por esta fe al revés (Mejía Duque, 1979, p. 41). Londoño de Franco writes that Isaacs stayed politically involved until 1885 and that this fueled personal attacks. This was evident in the flyers which circulated in Popayán on which the mocking nicknames “Samuel Beli-Beth” and “El Judío Errante” (“The Wandering Jew”)<sup>17</sup> were written. The author adds that these critiques were detrimental to Isaacs’s well-being. Londoño de Franco questions whether all the attacks against Isaacs at this time were due to his adherence to Freemasonry, his radical Liberalism, or his Sephardic ethnicity. The author concludes that the attacks were probably committed for all these reasons (Londoño de Franco, 1989, p. 357).

### 2.3 Isaacs was deprived of political and intellectual authority

The leaders of La Regeneración misused their political power to deprive Isaacs of political and intellectual authority. Jorge Isaacs blamed the Independent Liberal-Conservative coalition government for thwarting his scientific and diplomatic ambitions. Morales Benítez states that Raphael Núñez and Miguel Antonio Caro punished Isaacs by cancelling a contract which Isaacs had signed with the government for the mining of carbon and oil sources in La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and in the Golfo de Urabá. This resolution dated January 27, 1908, cynically declared that the concession had expired in 1897, even though it had never been approved by the government (cited by Morales Benítez, 1989, p. 29). In addition, the government leaders disgraced the memory of Jorge Isaacs, who had already died in 1895 (Morales

16 According to W. Laqueur it was in France that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* became the bible of antisemitism in the twentieth century. It was based on the Jewish conspiracy to conquer and control the world (Laqueur, 2006, p. 29). See *The Myth of an International Jewish Conspiracy* (M. Perry and F. Schweitzer, 2008, p. 139).

17 See the origin and evolution of the Wandering Jew legend throughout the centuries in (Metapedia, 2014).

Benítez, 1989, p. 29). Caicedo Licona writes some of the reasons for Caro's resentment: "En primer lugar Isaacs invoca validez para la Antropología y el desarrollo de otras ciencias en Colombia, de la tradición oral indígena en boca de sus Chamanes y denuncia al tiempo atropellos cometidos contra ellos por algunos misioneros y autoridades del régimen. Segundo que el investigador-poeta, ensayándose en la teoría Darwinista, interpreta una pictografía de la siguiente forma" (cited by Morales Benítez, 29).

In addition, when Isaacs was under serious economic distress, his fellow politicians and wealthy neighbors turned a blind eye on him and were indifferent to his alarming financial situation (Arciniegas, 1967, p. 12). This unfortunate situation affected Isaacs greatly, as he expressed in a letter to his friend Justo Sierra. Arciniegas refers to the letter, dated March 19, 1889, that Isaacs sent to Justo Sierra, Head of the Mexican Ministry of Culture in the government of General Porfirio Díaz<sup>18</sup>, with the hope that he might be compensated for the copyright of his novel *María*, written in 1867. However, his request was denied. In this letter Isaacs described his financial difficulties at the time: 'Ya es demasiado para mis fuerzas, amigo mío [...]. Usted sabe que en México se han hecho ya catorce ediciones de *María*, y las hechas en los demás países de Hispanoamérica [...]. ¿Qué resultado supone usted que daría en México [...] a formar un fondo que recompensara, siquiera en parte, mis derechos como autor de ese libro?' (cited by Arciniegas, 1967, p. 12).

Isaacs's request that General Porfirio Díaz appoint him as the Mexican ambassador in Colombia was also denied. He explained to Porfirio Díaz that his political situation had been reversed after Rafael Núñez allied himself with the Conservatives: 'Governando hoy este país los hombres que usted sabe—conservadores ultramontanos—, temo que se estorbe de algún modo que yo obtenga resultado definitivo de las labores en que vengo empeñado' (cited by Arciniegas, 1967, p. 79). Evidently, Rafael Núñez and Miguel Antonio Caro misused their political power to deprive Isaacs of political and intellectual authority. While Isaacs sought compassion, they sought to ostracize him from politics in order to prevent him from carrying out his diversified political agenda.

Caro discredited Isaacs not only in Colombia, but also abroad. Caro sent the following letter to his friend Victoriano Agüeros:

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18 José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz held the presidency in México nine times; in 1876 and from 1877 to 1880 on an interim basis. Later, he served as president from 1884 to 1911.

Isaacs es hijo de judío converso, y él tiene mucho de tornadizo. Ha sido realmente un hombre desgraciado, por su culpa y su mal carácter. En 1868 era conservador; sus partidarios le enviaron al Congreso. Entonces escribió 'MARIA' que yo ayudé a corregir en pruebas, y sus primeras poesías. De la noche a la mañana se hizo liberal y masón, y desde entonces se esterilizó por completo su entendimiento. Sin motivo alguno se declaró enemigo de la Iglesia, y hace gala de darwinista. En 1881 el gobierno de Núñez por favorecerlo le dio un comisión retribuida. Vino a Bogotá en 1855 y manifestó a Núñez su agradecimiento y deseo de servirle; y enseguida se marchó a pronunciarse contra el gobierno de Núñez que es un hombre muy generoso, no sólo le perdonó, sino que no ha mucho le mandó dar \$5.000.00 a \$6.000.00 para que fuese a explotar unas carboneras y en eso se ocupa ahora; Ahora mismo me ocupo de escribir un largo artículo de revista refutando las sandeces que ese hombre, que dió como explorador de la Guajira. Agradecería que Ud., sin hacer uso de mi nombre, rectifique esa maligna noticia esparcida para denigrar a este gobierno (la de su pobreza). En resumen. a tiempo que desde la Argentina hasta México las páginas de María hacían humedecer los ojos de jóvenes y viejos, de hombres y mujeres, como ninguna otra novela, tuvo la suerte de lograrlo, en Colombia la cosa se reducía a darle palo por masón, por liberal y por darwinista, cosas que habían esterilizado el entendimiento, hasta el hecho de haber descubierto el petróleo en la Guajira, resultaba una sandéz. El no era sino liberal, masón y darwinista. Y si no tenía ni un cobre era por eso? Por bruto. Nueva York, abril de 1958 (cited by Morales Benítez, 1989, p. 30).

President Caro belittled Isaacs's character with antisemitic personal insults. Caro attacked Isaacs not only because he changed his allegiance to Radical Liberalism in 1868 as many authors state, but also due to his allegiance to Masonry and "Darwinism". Caro's attempts to thwart the cultural expression of various ethnicities required that he place Colombia under the dominion of the clergy and the old cultural tutelage of militant Spain. Caro was an exponent of Catholic tradition and hierarchy and feared the destruction of the nation's values and ideals.

Isaacs struggled against the Catholic government in areas that he felt could provide solid foundations for a democratic society. For instance, Arciniegas states that as a radical liberal Isaacs strove to overthrow the theocratic feudalism both in Colombia and in the neighboring country of Ecuador. In 1869-70, as secretary of the House of Representatives, he granted Colombian citizenship to the Paraguayan people who were at war with Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay (Arciniegas, 1967, pp. 43-44).

Isaacs's powerful sense of commitment to democracy is manifested in his efforts to topple Rafael Núñez's government, whose ultimate goal was aimed at strengthening fundamental Conservatism and destroying Radical Liberalism.

In the same manner, Isaacs expressed his desire to revive Sephardic ethnic identity, as described in his book *La revolución radical en Antioquia, 1880*.

### **3. *La revolución radical en Antioquia, 1880***

In his book, Isaacs casts Rafael Núñez as an essentially antagonistic force since 1875, for deliberately misleading the Liberal Radicals by supporting the political dominance of the Conservatives: “La revolución que liberals traidores pactaron con el partido conservador i que tanta sangre y tantos sacrificios costó a Antioquia desde el 25 de enero ultimo; aquella revolución enjendro de las más ruines ambiciones i felonías está en camino de Victoria” (Jorge Isaacs, 1880, p. 19). Isaacs sought to subvert the Conservatives’ pact with the conservative party abusive authority and extreme views and hoped that, as a leader of Liberal Radicalism, he could return the state of Antioquia to a federal state with himself as the President of Antioquia. The ultramontane orthodoxies enforced by President Juan Trujillo and Rafael Núñez prevented Isaacs’s political ambitions from materializing and fostering the unity of the Liberals. For example, Isaacs describes how the corrupt Conservatives gained power in Antioquia. He had earlier confronted the administrations of President Juan Trujillo, and later, of Rafael Núñez. Isaacs had supported Trujillo in 1876 and 1877, when liberal forces were victorious over Catholic domination. However, in 1879, Isaacs denounced him as a traitor since Trujillo and Núñez had maliciously planned to remove Tomás Renjifo as the revolutionary leader of Radicalism in Antioquia. Isaacs describes how Renjifo was replaced by Pedro Restrepo Uribe, an act he says was arranged by Ernesto Cerruti, who Núñez and Trujillo commissioned to ensure that Renjifo was absent from Antioquia. This maneuver ensured that the Conservatives would come to power in Antioquia (Isaacs, 1880, pp. 76, 166). Isaacs writes: “Departiendo en la mesa con el señor Cerruti i el Jeneral Renjifo, le observamos a éste [Renjifo], que él no podía ausentarse así de Antioquia. únicamente con el fin que se indicaba, porque tal paso habria de estimarlo el partido radical del país como obra de despecho por el triunfo de los nuñistas en la lucha eleccionaria, o desercion injusticable, abandonando la bandera radical, a él confiada” (Jorge Isaacs, 1880, pp. 75-77). According to Isaacs “al ausentarse el ciudadano Jeneral Renjifo de este suelo donde tan merecidamente amado [...] El Señor Pedro Restrepo U. debía sucederle como segundo Vicepresidente del Estado: en su impaciencia febril por ocupar la silla presidencial, acudió a todo medio, a todo engaño a fin de mostrar satisfecha su vanidad” (Jorge Isaacs, 1880, p. 166).

Isaacs also condemns without reservation the church, the Conservative government, and the dissident liberals of 1878 who joined the Conservatives “Los liberales disidentes en 1878 están en el campamento conservador. ¡Cuán ufanos, impotentes para ocultar su júbilo y en el afán de concluir la obra inicua, se presentan ya los paladines del partido católico. [...] vuelven a vanagloriarse a la que se interrumpió al jesuismo en 1877 [...] Vuelven a combatir la Educación Comun, llamándola perniciosa i atea en nombre del Vaticano” (Isaacs, 1880, pp. 55-56). Isaacs couldn’t comprehend the desire of liberal dissidents to restore fanaticism after “tánta sangre, tántas vidas i tántas lágrimas que ruedan aún por los rostros de viudas y huérfanos de soldados liberales” had been lost in the bloody battles against the clergy in the civil war of 1876 and 1877 (Isaacs, 1880, p. 55). Isaacs’s determination to heal the crisis of the Liberal party is strongest in his political struggle. Isaacs was loyal to his party and to the institutions with which it was identified.

Isaacs warned the Conservatives of fanaticism: “Que no intente el conservativismo, que no insista en recuperar aquí su dominacion anacrónica i absurda que no pretenda hacer de Dios un aliado para la satisfacción de ridículos orgullos y viles avaricias [...]”. Isaacs warned the Conservatives of real consequences: “porque sit al hiciera, sit al locura le cegara otra vez, las espadas liberales, sí, esas espadas, lease bien serán azotes de Dios [...]” (Isaacs, 1880, p. 13). Isaacs’s quest for the secession of Antioquia and its institutions from Colombia aimed at transforming a fundamentally conservative Antioquia into a unified, liberal homeland, thus dissociating the state from obsessive political religious fanatic views.

Also imbedded in Isaacs’s mind was the certainty that institutionalized Radicalism would guarantee economic progress and freedom of culture and identity. Isaacs embraces the Antioqueños’ Jewish origins ; and their love for productiveness in his statement, “Antioquia pueblo privilegiado para la índole y rigor de su raza, por su fuerza intelectual, ya poderosa, aunque apenas es todavía como simiente de selva que necesita sol y lluvia; Antioquia, pueblo de mision providencial en esta zona de América, debe y quiere cumplir sus destinos; i será así”<sup>19</sup> (Isaacs, 1880, p. 24).

On January, 1880 Isaacs launched a coup and declared himself head of the state of Antioquia. To his disappointment, Trujillo and Núñez dispatched

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19 Isaacs puts what is understood as an international Jewish conspiracy in a positive light. For a discussion of the Antioqueños’ monopoly of trade and industry see Eduardo Zuleta (1926, pp. 18-19). In: *Papeles viejos y nuevos* (1929) and Frank Safford, *Aspectos del siglo XIX en Colombia* (1977, pp. 111-113).

forces to overthrow him, even though Colombia's constitution required that the national government remain neutral in case of revolts within states (Morales Benítez, 2007, p. 48). It was clear to Isaacs that Trujillo and Núñez's program for deposing of him and Tomás Rengifo as the revolutionary leaders of Radicalism in Antioquia was a disgraceful injustice, and he describes it with his accustomed irony: "Fué necesidad i prudencia, i provisora precaucion, conseguir que el partido liberal de Antioquia no tuviera en el recinto de la Cámara un Representante, ni un defensor, i la arbitrariedad se han consumado, i la cobardía ha vencido" (Isaacs, 1880, p. 74). Isaacs understood that Conservative manipulation of opponents was not only political, but also personal in nature. The Independent Liberal-Conservative coalition aimed to ostracize him from politics, and Isaacs used his knowledge and writing skills to expose their manipulative actions.

According to Morales Benítez, Isaacs's coup d'état in Antioquia was the product of insightful political views and a clear idea of the future (Morales Benítez, 2007, p. 53). The author states that this coup d'état represented Isaacs's strong inclination to disassociate Antioquia from the church which he foresaw as becoming powerful again as established in the concordat of 1887 (Morales Benítez, 2007, p. 53). In addition, it represented Isaacs's vision that the process of liberal economic reforms established in the "Revolución económica de 1850" will be vulnerable to the policies of the political leaders of La Regeneración (Morales Benítez, p. 53).

Isaacs pursued his diverse political ambitions relating to freedom of culture, economic development, and education through active participation in Colombian politics. He also worked at attaining recognition of ethnic and cultural diversity through his commitment to Radical Liberalism and literary activism. His poem "La tierra de Córdoba" is most easily understood as a protest to the church domination.

#### 4. "La tierra de Córdoba"<sup>20</sup>

Isaacs's publication of the poem "La tierra de Córdoba" (1890) spurred an antisemitic backlash, a reaction to his inference that the Antioqueños were of Jewish origin. For instance, General Rafael Uribe Uribe (1859-1914) sent

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20 The title of the poem "La tierra de Córdoba" reminds us of José María Córdoba who won the battle of Ayacucho in 1824. He was born in 1779 in the city of Concepción, Antioquia (Bronx, 1974, pp. 122, 79, 10).



a series of letters to Isaacs which appeared in the newspaper *El Movimiento* ("The Movement"). Here it was declared that the Antioqueños were not of Jewish descent. Rather, he maintained that they were of Basque descent and compared their customs to those of the Basque people (Mesa Bernal, 1988, p. 205). The dismissal of the Jewish ethnic ancestry of the Antioqueños, a debate that started in 1803 with Manuel Del Campo Rivas's claim of a Jewish colonization in Antioquia in the sixteenth century, is built on a matrix of classic Antisemitism<sup>21</sup>.

Isaacs's poem embodies the strong anticlerical discourse of the time. It was a response to the antisemitic tradition imbued in the dogma of the Catholic Church, and society and it should be understood in the context of Isaacs's political and literary position in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It also derives meaning from the conflictual cultural context of nineteenth century Colombia, the total structure of church domination characteristic of post-colonialism, the exploitation of the Indigenous tribes, and the exclusion of Sephardic conversos in the history of Antioquia.

For Isaacs, it was fundamental to link his poetic art with history and his political and literary position. His desire for recognition of cultural difference and diversity found support in his fight against the nation's yoking of church and government. Isaacs was inspired by the philosophical ideas illustrated by the explicit positivist ideological liberal ideas<sup>22</sup> of his time, and by the literary practices of Romanticism such as the nineteenth century historical novel in Mexico. In his prologue of *El libro rojo*, Carlos Montemayor states that the confluence of literature with history in Mexico was influenced on one hand by the confluence of English Romanticism with the historical novel. The process of fostering the growth of this "historical literature" or of this "literary history" has been, on the other hand, fundamental to the development of Mexican literature in particular for the one that is linked with Realism and with the literature of political commitment (Riva Palacio and Payno, 1989, pp. 12-13).

Vicente Riva Palacio and Manuel Payno situated their novel *El libro rojo* (1989) within the political context of 1876. These authors and Justo Sierra O'Reilly in *La hija del judío* (1848) gave the novel's Jewish theme

21 Refer to pages 7-8 for relevant discussion. See Libia Velásquez Vásquez "Antisemitismo e historia judía de Antioquia, Colombia" (2014, pp. 155-187).

22 See Leonardo, Tovar Gonzáles for details on the difference between the reasoning of the liberal and conservative positivists ("Ciencia y Fe: Miguel Antonio Caro y Las Ideas positivistas" (n. d.).



an international character without having themselves any connection with Jews or Judaism. Their final goal was the disempowerment of the clergy. Manuel Payno and Vicente Riva Palacio fought ecclesiastical authorities by including certain cruel events of Jewish history in their writings. The clergy struggled in turn not for the Independence of Mexico but only to keep their privileges and power. For instance, Vicente Riva Palacio portrays in three chapters of this book the inquisitorial case of the Carabajal family murdered as a result of its Jewish faith and the cruelty and blindness of the Inquisitors. The dogmatism of the Auto de Fe of 1601 that facilitated the deaths of these conversos is reenacted contemptuously (Riva Palacio and Payno, 1989, pp. 177-238). Payno makes use of the tragic end of Moctezuma, Xicontécatl and Cuatémoc at the hand of the Spanish conquistadors (Riva Palacio and Payno, 1989, pp. 19-57). Justo Sierra O'Reilly in *La hija del judío*, considered the forerunner of the Mexican historical novel, fought the clergy by portraying in the first part of the novel an adopted daughter who learns that her real father has been suspected of Judaizing (proselytizing). She is feared to be part of the accursed race and to therefore forbidden to marry a man of Iberian descent. Her situation has become very serious since the Holy Office has required that she enter a convent and relinquish her father's assets to the court (Algaba, n. d, p. 135). While immersed in the literary context of nineteenth-century Mexico and inspired by the European historical novel, Justo Sierra O'Reilly situates his book between the seventeenth century history of Yucatán (specifically 1660 and 1677) and the fight of Yucatán to become once again a federal state in 1839 and later in 1843, 1846, and 1847 (Algaba, n. d, p. 143).

While Manuel Payno, Vicente Riva Palacio and Sierra O'Reilly used painful episodes of the Inquisition and the unfortunate end of Indian chiefs to criticize the clergy, Isaacs fought the clergy by using the model of Jewish identification. In the poem "La tierra de Córdoba", Isaacs uses iconic biblical themes to resist subjugation and homogeneity imposed by the Catholic Church and to construct a sense of Sephardic identity among the Antioqueños. He weaves the Antioqueños' way of life together with intricate biblical allusions. He makes it possible to experience Antioqueño history from a Jewish perspective in terms that were paradoxically different from nineteenth century Mexican historical novel writers. Thus, while Isaacs's contemporary writers such as Manuel Payno, Vicente Riva Palacio and Justo Sierra O'Reilly ironically used the Inquisition and the Holy Office to fight the clergy, Isaacs used the Old Testament to connect the Antioqueños with their historical Sephardic past.

Isaacs describes the Antioqueños in a manner that they recognize themselves as carrying on a Sephardic cultural tradition<sup>23</sup>. For Isaacs, the Antioqueño environment has such majesty that it reminds him of his Sephardic heritage and the biblical tradition. Isaacs evokes with vivid detail the Jewish customs of Antioqueño women. Isaacs portrays women in working in the “frondas lozanas del maizal” and enjoying the pleasure of country land, “entonces la oropéndola salvaje/ y el tordo negriazul/ anidan con sus tribus en palmas y boscajes” (Isaacs 1890, p. 291; IV. 5-6, 16). The poet compares the women from Antioquia with the daughters of Jesse; the father of the house of David, “¡bellas y pudibundas como fueron/ las hijas de Jessé!” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292; IV. 21-22). Isaacs compares other physical characteristics between Antioqueño women and Israelite women. The eyes of the Antioqueño women reflect “las noches de Kedén” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292; IV. 24). Kedén is defined as the Orient or East in Hebrew. Cecil Roth in the context of her analysis on the history of the Marranos explains “cómo los españoles conversos miraban hacia el oriente mientras rezaban. Mas aún cuando enterraban a sus muertos, colocaban los cadáveres mirando hacia el oriente” (cited by Londoño de Franco, 1989, p. 358). Mesa Bernal points out from a folkloristic survey in 1942 that Antioqueños as conversos did traditionally believe that the soul first made a journey toward the Jordan River and then to heaven: “el alma del difunto hacía un viaje hacía el río Jordán y luego al cielo” (Mesa Bernal, 1996, p. 356). Isaacs was more conscious of his Jewish origins than the Antioqueños were and this awareness contributed to his attempts to construct a sense of Sephardic ethnic identity among them.

Isaacs also fought to free the native people from bondage and repression. Thus, from Sephardism, the debate has moved to Native; (the Quimbayas and the Catíos, some of the autochthonous tribes of the Antioqueño territory) and to place them within their own rich cultural and historical realities as opposed to the gloomy realities of exploitation and colonization. For instance, Isaacs makes allusion to the references of Antioquia and the vestige of Indian cultures: the rich catacombs of the “Quimbaya y del Catío” tribes, treasures of “dioses y de monarcas indios” (Isaacs 1890, p. 289; II. 5-7). In the next verse Isaacs further expresses his strong rejection of Iberian colonialism.

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23 This text only cites some examples. For the analysis of Jorge Isaacs’ poetry and sense of Sephardic identity see Libia Velásquez Vásquez “Ethnic Sephardic Identity of the Poetry of Colombia” (2011, pp. 106-111).

The Indian riches are part of the economic structure of Antioquia because “el vándalo rapaz no pudo descubrir” (Isaacs 1890, p. 289; II. 8). While Isaacs condemns the Iberians, the Antioqueños also traded with the autochthonous tribes for the gold and silver. While rejecting the Iberian colonization in the “La tierra de Córdoba”, Isaacs also describes the symbolic aspects upon which the rich Antioqueño culture was built.

At the center of Isaacs’s development is José María Córdoba’s interest in winning the battle of the “Porce y el Nechi” against the Royalists, which was based upon independence from the Spanish bondage. This victory was also very important since the “playados lechos” of the “Porce” y el “Nechi” were dotted with gold. Europe paid its value like “el bello de Ofir” (Isaacs 1890, p. 289; II. 10-12). Isaacs indicates that Europe pays dearly for the gold of the region. Córdoba is representative of the courage shown by Jews at the mercy of their Inquisitors. In December 9, 1824 Córdoba defeated the last Royalist army in South America in the battle of Ayacucho, a historic event that affected the entire continent (Bronx, 1974, pp. 27, 79, 82). After the defeat of the Royalists, Córdoba’s companions entered the scene with “su vigor en su derecho, y su arma la segur” (Isaacs 1890, 290; II. 16). Isaacs is presenting hard work and courage as harmonious with the Sephardic character.

Isaacs goes on to suggest that the fulfillment of liberty accomplished by Córdoba enhances the economic prosperity of the Andean region. The Andean region is portrayed as a “vestíbulo de Arcadias” (Isaacs 1890, p. 290; II. 20), a realized democratic space, which prospers in freedom. Isaacs charts a different approach in the Sephardic and Iberian shared history. While Iberians have despoiled the natives of their riches, the Sephardim gave “savia rica y noble al patrio suelo” (Isaacs 1890, p. 290; II. 28). Isaacs is rejecting the imposed Christian origins of the Antioqueños by affirming the Antioqueños’ Sephardic culture. Isaacs then sheds some light on the role of the Spanish Conquistadors in America to mirror the economic and political situation of nineteenth century Antioquia which was an emerging nation and an economic power, with the objective to return the state of Antioquia to a federal state. Isaacs makes it possible to experience colonialism in terms that echoed novel history writers. For instance, Justo Sierra O’ Reilly revives the political-religious treachery of colonialism through the nationalist influence of nineteenth century Mexico with the purpose to consolidate Yucatán as an independent ‘nation’ (De la Lanza, 2010, p. 110).

As a persuasive politician, Isaacs portrays Spain's main goal as extending its conquests and destroying every civilization that came within its influence: "La Iberia en sus conquistas no creaba/pueblos de tu poder" (Isaacs 1890, p. 292: VI. 1-2). Isaacs then describes the character of King Ferdinand of Spain, nicknamed "el Tigre," as stifling the inner life and breaking down the spirit of his countrymen. The annihilation of a large Indian population in America was carried out by the ruthless and harsh proceedings of King Ferdinand of Spain: "vivieron en espanto de hinojos...turba esclava,/ los que diezmó, ya indómitos, Fernando el Tigre Rey" (Isaacs 1890, p. 292: VI. 4). The king Ferdinand had great influence on the Spanish legislation for the Indies. The king, being of Divine right, had the power of life and death over his subjects. Among the varieties and forms of Indian subjection associated with the term "hierro" [iron] in verse 5 Isaacs refers to the official branding-iron for "ransomed slaves" (hierro de rescate) and for 'war ransom' slaves (hierro de Guerra). In times of war the Christians considered the native tribes private property. If those native tribes had slaves, the chief of the tribe used the slaves as payment of ransom or tribute. With the "tributos," Isaacs seems to refer to the "encomiendas," which Juan de Zolórzano Pereira (1647) defines as follows:

right conceded by royal bounty to the mercy and will of the King, to well deserving persons in the Indies, to receive and enjoy for themselves the tributes of the Indians who should be assigned to them, with a charge of providing for the good of those Indians in spiritual and temporal matters, and of inhabiting and defending the provinces where these encomiendas should be granted to them (Helps, 1966, p. 79).

Isaacs goes on to account that Iberians "brought the ruin" to the Indigenous tribes. Then, the poet calls upon reflection on the injustices and abuses committed in the name of "libertad" and, if that could not be done, "merecen en laceria y opresión morir" (Isaacs 1890, p. 292; VI. 8). The poverty and oppression leads Isaacs to question the consequences of the Spanish Empire and its colonial powers to enslave the native population to the concepts of exile and rootlessness. Isaacs then poses the question: "¿España qué les dio del Nazareno?/¿La ley de paz y amor?" (Isaacs 1890, p. 292 VI. 9-10). Christians should have been concerned in promoting the law of peace and love that the Nazarene taught and not the "high policy of Gold" sought by the Western Empire.

In the next stanza, "no basta la cólera divina/a herir y exterminar" could be referring to the diseases brought to the New World by the Spanish

Conquistadores. The Iberians conquest meant the destruction of the dynasty of the Incas embodied in “Atahualpa, Zipa and Guatimoc” (Isaacs 1890, 292; VI. 12-14). Isaacs’s account of the myth of God’s “cólera” was in fact murder in God’s name. The “cólera divina” punished the Conquistadores with violent death, and Isaacs states with irony whether it was not enough (Isaacs 1890; VI. 13). The tyrannical characteristics of the Iberians continued to grow with individuals such as “Pizarros y Quesadas, Añascos y Valdivias” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292; VI. 15). As these Conquistadors moved on, new dreadful Conquistadors took their place, “Sámamo, Morillos y Tolrá” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292; VI. 16). The Spanish Christian heritage represents the repression and destruction of culture: “¡Y viven! ...En centurias engendrados/de tinieblas y horror.../ la ciega prole fueron de monsters semihumanos/caínes a quien piélagos de sangre no sació” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292; VI. 17-20). As a radical liberal Isaacs could not disassociate himself from the plights of the native population and strived to produce a discourse to nurture self-differentiated identities.

Isaacs makes it possible to experience Nationalism in terms that echoed Justo Sierra O’ Reilly. For instance, Sierra O’ Reilly examines the internal battles between the colonial clergy and blends it into the nationalistic ambitions of Mexicans and the growing nineteenth century Latin American Nations (Sofia de la Lanza, 2010, p. 110). Isaacs examines colonialism to promote his Radical Liberal ideas which sought to restrict the church’s political power thereby fusing his ideas into what should become known as an independent liberal nascent nation.

Like the Indigenous tribes cultures, the Jewish culture was also the target of destruction and obliteration. Spanish Nationalism was a problem for the colonies. Isaacs disassociates the Antioqueño Sephardic culture of his day from the barbaric Iberians who destroyed the culture of the Indigenous tribes: “has repudiado la ominosa herencia/del ibero crüel” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292; VI. 21). The Sephardic Antioqueños have paved their way by sustaining and maintaining democratic practices and the essential being of the “nation”: “ni tu labor es suya, ni suya la belleza” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292; VI. 23). Isaacs attributes these accomplishments to your “hijas”, who are “orgullo de Israel” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292; VI. 24). Isaacs’s belief was that Spain was an influential power and a center of intellectual activity because of the outstanding contribution of the Spanish Jews. Thus, the poet is suggesting that

Jews were the true Spaniards. By deporting the Spanish Jews, Spain was no longer a world-famous nation and a spring of civilization. Accordingly, Isaacs removed Spain from the center of the world stage. For Isaacs, the ancestry of Antioqueños represents all this: “no hay en ti lepra de la estirpe goda/ which when it had victory over “Boabdil/lanzó de sus dominios la raza poderosa/ que a España hizo el emporio del mundo y su pensil” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292; VI. 25-28). Ending the stanza with the image of the “fecundo enjambre del pueblo perseguido” and with the heroic contributions of Antioqueño heroes “Girardot and Córdoba” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292: VI. 31-32) to the liberation of the American land from the Iberians, Isaacs places Antioquia outside the Iberian’s political and religious aspirations, “implacable crueldad” (Isaacs 1890, p. 292: VI. 30) and as a “nation” in which the Sephardic heritage is maintained<sup>24</sup>. Isaacs sees the struggle for liberty of the Antioqueño heroes as a vestige of the Sephardic identity.

## 5. Conclusion

There is clear evidence that Jorge Isaacs had to confront antisemitism from Catholic society, the clergy, and political leaders during his political career. The antisemitic prejudices of the political leaders of La Regeneración against Isaacs had a harmful impact on his innovative enterprises as embodied in his intellectual oeuvre. These include his political agenda, the establishment of a democratic system that included secular education, his struggle to bring about Antioquia’s federal autonomy and the consolidation of the liberals as expressed in his book *La revolución radical en Antioquia, 1880*, his ethnographic and linguistic studies of Indigenous culture of the Guajira and Magdalena, and the recognition of ethnic cultures advocated in his poem “La tierra de Córdoba” (1890).

This essay contributes to identifying antisemitism as the source of Isaacs’s personal and political failures. It endeavors to explain and interpret antisemitism and to account for its effects with pointed criticism. Unfortunately,

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24 For an understanding of the conflict between nations and regions see Jaime Uribe Jaramillo, “Visión sintética de la tarea investigativa desarrollada sobre la región antioqueña” (1982, pp. 1-15.) and Belisario Betancur, “El lenguaje como expresión de la historia de Antioquia” (1991, pp. 5-29).



Isaacs's biographers and historians have not openly or specifically identified the recurring phenomenon of antisemitism in Isaacs's political career because it has been a taboo in Colombian society. It should be noted that Isaacs's biographers have examined different aspects of Isaacs's intellectual oeuvre. Some biographers have written about the attacks and slander that Isaacs endured during this chapter of Colombian history without identifying these incidences as antisemitism. Others have examined Isaacs's life and work in the traditional critical manner, such as through comparisons or a focus on influences of European models on Isaacs's novel *María*. Other biographers have enhanced our understanding of the interpersonal conflicts in which Isaacs was involved during his turbulent political career.

This essay interprets Isaacs's book *La revolución radical en Antioquia, 1880* as a call for the liberation of Sephardic identity, the denouncement of the abuses of power during the government of *La Regeneración*, and as an intellectual endeavor to reach the consolidation of Liberals. This essay innovatively identifies the nineteenth century practices of Romanticism, Positivism and materialist liberal ideas used to fight the clergy as expressed in the poem "La tierra de Córdoba", thus affirming the Antioqueños' Sephardic ethnic identity and calling for recognition of the Guajira and Magdalena Indigenous tribes as equal citizens possessing their own identity. Through the literary practice of Romanticism as seen in the nineteenth century Mexican historical novel, Isaacs pursued a political line of attack aimed at undermining clerical power and by this means strengthening the Sephardic and Indigenous identities. In the same manner, Isaacs's use of nineteenth century English evolutionist ideas debated within Positivism demonstrates Isaacs's fight for secular education and separation of religion from science.

Isaacs was persistent in promoting radical liberalism, despite prejudices against his Sephardic ethnicity and liberal agenda. He believed that Radicalism could eradicate the repression and intimidation exercised by the Government of Miguel Antonio Caro and Raphael Núñez. Repression, however, is the price Isaacs paid for acceptance into Catholic Colombian society. Acceptance into the dominant Catholic society involved assenting to its patronages, concessions of conscience, and inevitable hypocrisies. Ultimately, however, his status as a "tornadizo, Freemason, and Jew" prevented his voice from being heard and stifled his ambitious political objectives, which were considered an affront to the traditionalist Catholic Colombian nation.



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