Three Echoes of Antisemitism in Colombia from 1945 to 1948

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Abstract
Following the end of World War II, when the world learned about the Holocaust, manifestations of antisemitism grew in Colombia as echoes of what was happening in other countries, both in the region and globally. This paper examines three such manifestations that occurred between 1945 and 1948: Echo 1 concerns an urban campaign against Jews during 1945 by conspirators who handed out flyers or pamphlets with antisemitic messages. Echo 2 concerns the only violence against Jewish traders in Colombian history. It happened in 1946 and culminated in 44 warehouses being destroyed and several Jews being beaten. And Echo 3 concerns the renowned case of the SS Exodus (1947), whose 4500 Jewish travelers presented Colombian visas to leave Europe. The recognition of these activities constitutes a contribution to the field of history, to Jewish communities, and to the study of antisemitism, with the aim of remembering those minorities excluded and challenged in such contexts.

Keywords Jews · Antisemitism · Colombia · Bogotá

Introduction
With the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and National Socialism in Germany, from 1933 until after 1945, European Jews endured a process of exclusion, rejection, expulsion, and destruction within German society and German-occupied territories. Over 300,000 Europeans of Jewish origin left the Old Continent before, during, and after the Third Reich to avoid various antisemitic actions.

Researcher Avraham Milgram explains that: “The role of Latin American countries was secondary to the European conflict of the 30s and 40s, but instead it was of great importance in terms of the salvation of Jews” (Milgram 2003, 10). In the Americas, the United States was the busiest destination, which saw the arrival of
165,000–212,000 immigrants, followed by Argentina (45,000), Brazil (25,000), Chile (15,000), and Uruguay, Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Mexico (2000–7000) (Blancpain 1992, 123).

For its part, Colombia received only about 6000 Jewish travelers (Neumann 1941, 386), which constituted the largest wave of its kind to the country. Immigrants faced many complications and complexities, following a fierce debate that began in the 1920s between intellectuals, politicians, and merchants that concluded with the establishment of stringent immigration policies (Leal 2015). This meant that Colombia lost the opportunity to enrich its cultural diversity by accepting these migrants; many Jewish applicants (more than 15,000, according to Foreign Ministry figures) had to stay in Europe, some of whom died at the hands of Adolf Hitler’s antisemitic government.

However, after the end of World War II (1939–1945), and after learning of the horror of the Shoah, the Colombian authorities maintained the restrictions on Jewish immigration and, in the following years, only about 350 people of Hebrew origin entered the country (Bibliowicz 2001). This raises the important question of why this happened, and whether, beyond maintaining these restrictions on Jewish immigration, there were any other signs of local antisemitism in the aftermath of World War II (1945–1948).

In addressing this, the starting point is 1945, following the German surrender and the end of the Third Reich, whose extermination policies targeted Jewish communities. Subsequently, this powerful voice that proliferated antisemitism (of course it was not the only one) began to dissipate, although it is recognized that, with the end of the conflict, pogroms, rejections, or even murders among the international Jewish community did not end. An example of this is that, during the first seven months after the end of the war, there were 350 antisemitic murders in Poland (Johnson 2006, 754).

In Latin America, there were also specific manifestations of antisemitism. According to Eduardo Weinfeld, “Antisemitism itself, that is, hatred of Jews and their persecution because they are Jews, did not exist in any American country before 1933” (1948, 344), while Weinfeld’s statement may be contested. After this

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1 The word “Holocaust,” in its original sense *Holo-kautos*, means “religious sacrifice before the Jews, in which the entire victim was burned,” so it acquires a “ritual” sense of satisfying the divinity. Some authors prefer to avoid the term to avoid theological discussions. The term *Holocaust*, translated as “extermination, catastrophe and calamity” (Biermann 2005, 2) will be the one used in this work.

2 According to researcher Leonardo Senkman, between 1946 and 1951, 24,804 Jews arrived in Latin America, of whom 1219 arrived in Colombia (Senkman 2007, 6).

3 Although Weinfeld (1948) indicates that antisemitism did not exist in “any American country before 1933,” there is an important history of antisemitism in the continent, for example in Argentina, with the Semana Trágica. During January 7–14, 1919, a generalized repression by the government of Hipólito Yrigoyen against workers’ protests ended in a persecution by police forces and armed civilian groups against Jewish institutions and people in the country. As a result of the day, there were outrages, acts of violence, looting and arrests against members of the community (Dimenstein 2009, 103).

On the other hand, it is important to point out that also in the 1930s, immigration restrictions were being imposed in different countries of America. The United States filled its immigration quota in 1939 and President Roosevelt did not increase the quota. However, a large part of the American president’s cabinet and supporters (90 percent of the voters) were of Jewish origin, so Roosevelt contributed to the
date, however, Nazi-like groups took political advantage of anti-Jewish agitation. In Mexico, there was a largely unchallenged upsurge in antisemitic propaganda, including articles, books, and posters, as well as antisemitic actions committed by the Gold Shirts movement. In Brazil, the country’s nationalization led to the closure of foreign schools and the prohibition of foreign languages, which contributed to the suspension of communal, cultural, and Zionist activities among Brazilian Jews (see Lesser 1995). In Argentina, organized antisemitism manifested as ghettoization, restrictions on the Yiddish press, the prohibition of hoisting the Zionist flag, anti-Jewish propaganda, and acts of violence against communities (see Senkman 2007). In Bolivia, an anti-Jewish and anti-refugee rally was organized following a debate in

Footnote 3 (continued)
creation of an American committee to help German and Polish refugees. And only by 1944, when 60 percent of the Jews had died in the Shoah, the Allies created the Committee for War Refugees. With that committee Nazis were contacted clandestinely to save the lives of 200,000 Jews (Avni 1992, 232–263).

Argentina is an exceptional case because it was a refuge for victims and victimizers. President Juan Domingo Perón once warned: “The German State has invested millions to train engineers; for us, they only cost us an airplane ticket.” This, added to the fact that taking in the defeated was an act of provocation to the United States, made Argentina a recurrent destination for the Nazis (Blancpain 1992, 134). The government made a clear differentiation between refugees and immigrants and therefore did not count the former in the quota of national immigration legislation since this administration saw in the European arrival (without discriminating against Nazis or Jews) a reinforcement of the peasant population or a gain in education for the benefit of the country. And it is that in Argentina the Jewish colony was strong. The largest group of Jewish defenders was precisely in Buenos Aires. The deputy Americo Ghioaldi presented in August 1938 a bill to achieve an agreement between the nearby countries and to find a solution for the European Jews. In addition, it was there where the Israeli Philanthropic Association was constituted, which since 1933 helped the new arrivals with lodging, food and readaptation; however, there was opposition. In 1938, Argentine Minister Cantilo asked for a selection according to the physiognomy of the country. And in the press the Jews were labeled as: “parasites, corrupters and traffickers of gold, currency and influence.” There were opportunities for entry, but there was no lack of anti-Semites who opposed the government’s open policies. Brazil imposed restrictions as early as 1937 and two years later the government banned Jews from entering the country. Chile, which had closed its doors since 1936, granted certain tourist visas between 1938 and 1939 (Blancpain 1992, 121), but immigrants there were not well received because they were held responsible for the tensions affecting national life. Uruguay demanded 400 dollars from newcomers or that they had relatives in the country. Paraguay, on the other hand, required them to have a visa or knowledge of agriculture. Bolivia, which had its doors open until 1938, suddenly closed them to Gypsies, Jews, and Mongolians. Even so, by 1939 it had granted about 9000 visas to Jews. And four years later, the Jewish population was 5150 (Blancpain 1992, 124). The government of the Dominican Republic accepted the entry of 100,000 Jews into its territory, thanks to the establishment of an agricultural colonization project. The president, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, donated 10,670 hectares for the Jews on the northern coast of the country (Avni 1992, 277). However, agricultural work attracted only 432 people. Ecuador ratified in 1935 an agreement with a Jewish organization in Paris to settle several Semites in Ecuadorian lands. The government of José María Velasco promised freedom of worship and 485,000 hectares, but once again agriculture played an important role, because in 1938 the benevolence of the Ecuadorian government, which expelled the Hebrews for not complying with the commitment to devote themselves to the land, came to an end. Thus, the American countries gradually closed the massive entry of Jews to the continent, even though they knew of their need for refuge. In 1939, the MS St. Louis arrived in Havana (Cuba) with 936 passengers, but the government did not allow it to sail, arguing that the legislation had been repealed. The ship had to loiter in the Atlantic Ocean while Jewish organizations tried to convince either the Cuban or the American government to receive the refugees. But neither accepted. In Cuba, the authorities were backed by anti-Semitic groups. And the United States, the government of democracy and freedom, simply did not accept it (Avni 1992, 276). The MS St. Louis had to return to Europe and the Jews to their “destination.”
the Chamber of Deputies that led to restrictions on immigration, including transit. In Chile, there were riots in protest against the immigration of Jews, who were seen as competing against merchants and industrialists (Weinfeld 1948, 345–348).

However, according to researcher Paul Johnson, the Shoah “brought about a qualitative change in the way international society reacted to the violence inflicted on Jews. It was universally agreed that both punishment and reparation were necessary, and to some extent both goals were achieved” (Johnson 2006, 755). Thus, war-crime trials began, with around 150,000 accused and more than 100,000 being convicted, many for anti-Jewish crimes (Jewish Encyclopedia 1951, 212).

This period ended in 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel, which gradually led to a large exodus of Jews around the world to “their promised land.” Manuel Goldstein states that immigration to Colombia in those years “could almost be counted on the fingers of one hand” (Goldstein 2006), because most of the Jews living in the country wanted to rebuild their lives in Israel or the United States. With the flow of migrants during these years, a Jewish population of 5830 resided in the country between 1947 and 1948 (Zala 1947, 737).

Studies regarding the Shoah, antisemitism, and Jewish communities around the world are increasing every day. There are valuable fragmented works, although in Colombia much of this history still remains in the collective memory of the communities and in the official and press archives. In this context, contributions have been developed related to the settlement of Jews in the country and the immigration of these communities, but very little is still known about the development of antisemitic actions, especially after the end of the war. According to the Argentine researcher Leonardo Senkman (2007, 1), “The response to the catastrophe of the Shoah by the Jewish community organized during the immediate post-war years has not yet been studied from the perspective of social history and collective memory.”

To this end, a process of reconstructing archives was developed using primary and secondary sources, including the press, official archives, and related bibliographies. Following the indiciary paradigm of Carlo Ginzburg (1989), an attempt was made to find “clues” (hints, traces, or symptoms) of antisemitism (going beyond rhetoric to include actions). This paper presents three Colombian actions against the Jewish population during the post-war period in the study period (from 1945 to 1948) representing the transition from discourse to action.

The identification of these manifestations of antisemitism in Colombia has not been published before in the international context and constitutes a contribution to the field of history, to Jewish communities, and to the study of antisemitism, by recognizing echoes of this phenomenon in countries as far away from Europe as Colombia. It represents a desire to “remember,” to honor the memory of, and find justice for, those minorities excluded and challenged in this context (Reyes Mate 2003, 244). Although the germ of antisemitism was generated and developed in Europe, it must be recognized that Colombia contributed its share, through restrictions and

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4 It should be noted that, according to The American Jewish Year Book, the Jewish population in Colombia continued to grow, reaching 9000 people in 1959 (Shapiro, 1959).
other manifestations of antisemitism, which in this work are conceived as “echoes” of this phenomenon.\(^5\)

### “The Jewish Question” in Colombia

Prior to this wave of European Jews arriving in Colombia in the 1930s and 1940s, two migratory flows have been recognized. The first is Sephardic, which occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, comprising descendants of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 who had settled in the Antilles. The other is Ashkenazi, comprising Jews from Eastern Europe who immigrated in the late 1920s and early 1930s in search of better economic opportunities (see Fawcett and Posada Carbó 1998, 57–79). This latest wave enriched the former Ashkenazi community with Polish Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. A new community, called Montefiore, was also formed by German travelers (Bibliowicz 2001). According to the Immigration Office, in 1939, the Jewish population in the country had reached 5000 souls, while The American Jewish Year Book noted that there were about 5800 at the end of the war (Statistics of Jews 1947–1948, 737).

While this is not a high percentage (0.06%) in relation to the 9,400,000 inhabitants of the country in 1941 (Linfield and Moskowitz 1941, 667), it gradually became less uncommon to find so-called klapers (those who knock on the door) in the streets, i.e. Polish Jewish vendors who engaged in trade from door to door, as well as other merchants on Bogotá’s 7th avenue, between 16th and 22nd streets, industrialists, and even Jewish doctors and teachers. Alongside them, improvised synagogues began to appear in urban centers such as Bogotá, Cali, and Barranquilla.\(^6\)

Regarding the relationship between Colombians and Jews, a xenophobic and antisemitic reaction is noted among certain nationals, who saw foreigners as invaders of their own space, in both social and economic terms. In Colombia, antisemitism is constructed as a product of global discourses that are transferred and adapted to the local level in confluence with close experiences with Jews, which constructs the figure of “the Jew” from the reference to otherness, so that he becomes an antipode depending on the place from which he is seen. In the arguments of those who demonstrated against this immigration, we find a millenary construction “of the Jew,” product of the convergence of independent factors, more or less intense according to the circumstances, but subject to particular dynamics. According to the researcher

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\(^5\) The pamphletist Wilhelm Marr (1879) used the term to differentiate Jews from a racial perspective. The concept of “race” began to be used as a pseudo-scientific category by assigning certain characteristics to different “racial” groups. According to researcher Max S. Hering Torres (2007), this racist delimitation is really a “social construction,” in which “depending on the time and the region in which it originates, it adapts to the different conceptions of truth and morality, as well as to the prevailing conditions, realities and social interests and, from this, it recreates new captivating realities linked to the different conceptions of power, theology and science.” These new captivating realities are not mere social constructions, but become social practices, thus constituting valuable discursive entities.

\(^6\) As well as commerce and industry, researcher Enrique Martínez Ruiz states that real-estate investments were a fundamental strategy deployed by many Jewish immigrants in Bogotá to integrate into Bogotá society (see Martínez, 2010).
Zygmunt Bauman, “The conceptual Jew was a semantically overloaded entity, encompassing and combining meanings that should have remained isolated,” but which remained in force to the point of constituting the “Jew” into a prismatic category. Like a prism, from different points of observation it is possible to refract a particular image (Bauman 1997, 52). In Colombia, for communists, Jews are rejected as part of capitalism, and vice versa; for Catholics, they are murderers of their God; for some Germans established in the country, they represent an inferior “race”; for xenophobic nationalists, they are the foreign invasion; for Creole racists, they are the imperfect component of a “race”; and for Colombian merchants, they are the epitome of usury and competition (Leal 2015, 122). For example, representatives of the Chambers of Commerce of Popayan, Palmira, Honda, Bucaramanga, Cucuta, Cartagena, Barranquilla, Medellin, and Bogotá sent letters to the Ministry in which they asked for the immigration into the country of “undesirable elements” to be prevented, especially the “Hebrew race” (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1931–1949).

Similarly, National Socialist ideas had been welcomed by Germans and Colombians who were sympathetic to the National Socialist ideology. From 1933 (until what date is still unknown), a cell of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP; the German National Socialist Workers’ Party, or Nazi Party) existed, comprising 300 members, primarily in the city of Barranquilla. According to historian Max Friedman (2003, 71), although these groups did comprise German leaders who believed in the tenets of the Nazi Party, they mostly comprised nationalists who saw the movement as a way to commemorate Germany’s national glory and remember their home.

There is no information about these groups after the end of the war, but it is noteworthy that this type of National Socialist ideology was welcomed in some Orthodox areas of Colombia. Historian César Ayala suggests that a few sections of the heterogeneous conservative party group saw European fascism as an possible solution to Colombia’s problems. These groups were called “The Nationalists,” who promoted fascism as a means of struggle and “The Leopards,” who believed in the importance of a strong regime in relation to organizing the conservative party and fighting the revolutionaries (La Patria 1936, 4). There were also the “Blackshirts,” a conservative youth group that wore black shirts in the manner of Italian fascists and sought to follow the paradigms of Benito Mussolini’s government.

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7 See Ayala Diago (2007, 160).
8 “The Leopards” was a group of five young, ultra-Catholic, antidemocratic conservatives who were admirers of Mussolini and whose purpose was to establish an aggressive policy. Silvio Villegas is, perhaps, the most important exponent of the group’s ideology. However, a decade later he decided to change his position to one opposed to fascism (see Arias Trujillo 2007).
To this were added the positions of intellectuals who considered the Jews an undesirable “race,” or those who, following the Roman Catholic tradition, saw them as “murderers of God” (Leal 2015). Similarly, they requested that legal status not be granted to these latest communities, promoting a Plebiscite in 1942 to expel them via a famous Colombian conservative newspaper, which was run by the later president Laureano Gómez (a supporter of Hitler’s National Socialism).

All this ended in restrictions on the entry of more Jews into the country in the form of prohibitions, with few exceptions. The news that arrived concerning the horrors committed by the Nazis against European Jews did not lead to changes in the position of the Colombian authorities. This determination demonstrated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, endorsed by the government of Eduardo Santos, continued throughout the international conflict.10

**Colombia in the Post-War Period**

Colombia maintained its position of support and solidarity with the United States during World War II. Eduardo Santos (1938–1942), Alfonso López Pumarejo (1942–1945), and Alberto Lleras Camargo (1945) all accepted US demands in relation to the international conflict (Galvis and Donadio 2002), with Colombia even losing three schooners to the Germans (Durán 1977, 43).11,12

In 1946, the conservative Mariano Ospina Pérez became president and his government ended the so-called liberal hegemony that had begun in 1930. During his time in power, a wave of bipartisan violence developed in the country, which continued for decades and paved the way for the emergence of outlawed armed groups that remain to this day (see Bushnell 1984, 263–275).

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9 “Race” was at the beginning an important framework in the immigration debate during 1920s in Colombia, but it becomes less relevant as World War II approaches and unfolds. The discourse of the preeminence of “Race” seems to have been more welcome in German communities (whose nation was structured on the basis of racism) than in Colombian ones, and seems to lose importance with the arrival of the war. Before 1939, the topic of “race” is recurrent in the media agenda; but in the early 1940s, it becomes a taboo (Leal 2015).

10 Few exceptions were found among applications from Jewish immigrants. Among these exceptions, the HICEM (a Jewish organization established in 1927, with the aim of boosting the emigration of Jews from Europe) found over 250 transit visas issued up to 1943 (La Voz 1943, 6).

11 During the government of Eduardo Santos, ties with the United States were substantially strengthened, through restructuring, such as the elevation of the US legation to an embassy, and through military and economic cooperation agreements (Bushnell 1984, 21–26).

12 After the attack on one of the Colombian schooners, representatives of the Jewish community expressed their solidarity through a letter sent to the authorities: “On behalf of the Hebrew Victory Aid Committee we convey to the Government of the Republic and through its dignified channel to the Colombian People, our deep expression of regret and our sincere protest at the new and cowardly aggression to which the country has been subjected through Nazi savagery. We know that by offering the Government and the noble Colombian people our unrestricted support in this crucial hour of their destinies, we convey the feelings of all the Jews residing in Colombia, who feel as their own the cause of the country where they have found a safe refuge and a kind homeland. […] We Hebrews, who have ourselves suffered Hitler’s infamy, feel better than anyone the pain that the noble Colombian country is experiencing at this moment. [Signed by Miguel Adler and Salomón Brainsky.]” (El Diario Popular 1943, 4).
The government of Ospina Pérez did not introduce more open immigration policies, but neither did it express any kind of rejection of the Jews living in the country. However, increased violence did exacerbate the rise of antisemitism. During this short period, antisemitic propaganda was spread in the streets of Colombia, a Violence against Jewish traders in Bogotá was instigated, and the restrictive policy on immigration to the country by people of Jewish origin was maintained.

Echo 1: The Urban Antisemitic Campaign, According to El Diario Popular

*El Diario Popular*, a socialist-affiliated journalistic organ run by Gilberto Vieira (a Colombian), supported every Jewish cause and denounced antisemitic actions in the country. In March, April, and May, 1945, this Colombian publication expressed its dissatisfaction with the urban campaign against the Jews, comprising the distribution of flyers or brochures containing antisemitic messages in which neither the printer nor the authors were identified. The name of one such publication was *Frente Único* (*United Front*), which promoted “the most blatant pseudo-nationalist agitation against the Jews” (*El Diario Popular* 1945c, 1) using the National Socialist arguments of Adolf Hitler, adding that the “most authentic notion of true Colombianism induces every decent person to reject the Nazi farce of antisemitism as false and dangerous.”

According to *El Diario Popular* (1945a, 2), latent antisemitism was a “cavernous and undemocratic” way of laying the blame for the evils of the crisis generated by the world war on a specific group, adding that: “The outbreaks of antisemitism in our country have so far had some results. There is already a certain propensity against the Jews who inhabit our territory, accusing them of being loan sharks and usurers, when in fact the truth is that this attitude is not the exclusive property of that group but is an intrinsic condition of trade in general within the capitalist system.” It is striking that, for these socialists, the accusation of being “loan sharks and usurers” should not fall solely on the Jews but rather on all merchants. The fight for them was against the capitalist system, not against Judaism.

The columnist Alfonso Durán thought in a similar way, maintaining that, at a time when fascism was overthrown in Europe, in Colombia “we seem to be flooded by a wave of maudlin, hypocritical and rogue literature against the Jewish ‘race’” (*El Diario Popular* 1945d, 1–2). This literature argued that Jews are undesirable traders, speculators, and forward sellers but, above all, that the exploitation of the Colombian working class was due to these immigrants, which, in the words of the writer, confuses and disorients the masses.

He continued as follows: “It would be foolish to deny that there are among the Jews living in Colombia, merchants, loan sharks and forward sellers. But are such activities exclusively the responsibility of Jews? Absolutely not.” For the columnist, not all Jews are merchants, as they perform multiple jobs and diverse professions, and not all merchants are Jews. Consequently, Durán maintained that the standard-bearers of anti-Judaism were in fact competing traders because “for every Jewish
speculator operating in the country, there are a hundred large and small Colombian speculators” (El Diario Popular 1945e, 4).

On April 12, 1945, El Diario Popular published a communiqué from the CTC (Conference of Workers of Colombia), in which they called on the democratic press not to contribute to antisemitism, including by remaining silent on the issue (notably, no statement has been found regarding the alleged antisemitic campaign of this period in other media), given that “in Colombia there is no problem with Jews or other immigration sectors, except among Nazi Germans and Spanish Falangists, pernicious foreigners supporting the antisemitic campaign who do represent a serious danger” (El Diario Popular 1945b, 1).

El Diario Popular claimed to be using its voice to warn against the racist campaign that followers of Nazism intended to start in Colombia. On June 14, 1945, they were even more forceful in arguing that organizations were being created with recognized pro-Nazi members who encouraged antisemitism and instigated the death of Jews (El Diario Popular 1945f, 1, 4). The authors called for the conspirators to be jailed. According to the Socialists, on June 22, 1945, drunken people in downtown Bogotá proclaimed “Down with Jews!” and “Long live the Falange!” (El Diario Popular 1945g, 1).

Although El Diario Popular claimed that this antisemitic wave was instigated by Frente Único conspirators, it has not been possible to find evidence to support this. Neither the literature nor the periodicals of the time reveal any support for El Diario Popular’s claims, although this does not mean that certain actions, such as the distribution of flyers, did not take place. Such a campaign, however, could have helped pave the way for the only violence act against Jewish traders ever to be recorded in Colombia.

Echo 2: Violence Against Jewish Traders in Bogotá

By 1946, there was a population of approximately 9,523,200 inhabitants in Colombia, 5800 of whom were Jews (0.06%) (Zala 1947, 737). At this time, three communities of Jewish origin (Sephardic, Azquenazi, and Montefiore) were settled in the territory, performing their religious services in makeshift synagogues, with many working in areas related to commerce, among many other areas, including education and real estate (see Martínez 2010).

On Wednesday, May 8, 1946, at around 6:30 p.m., Jacobo Fisboim (a 21-year-old Polish Jew living in Bogotá) was walking along 7th avenue, between 17 and 18th streets, when he met Alfonso Pardo Ruiz (a 20-year-old Colombian Catholic); the ensuing brawl led to violence in the city center.13 Some versions suggest that the origin of the fight was a woman (the cousin of Pardo Ruiz, whom Fisboim would have been courting without the consent of his relatives), while others maintain that

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13 The reconstruction of this episode is based on articles published on May 9, 1946, in El Diario Popular, El Tiempo, El Siglo, El Espectador, and La Razón.
it was an attack perpetrated by the Colombian (who had been detained for a similar incident the night before).\textsuperscript{14}

While the brawl was quelled by the police, the angry Pardo Ruiz reportedly caught the attention of passers-by with phrases such as “Death to the Poles and Jews!” (El Diario Popular 1946a, 1) (see Fig. 1). Subsequently, the frightened Fisboim took refuge in the drugstore on 18th street with 7th avenue, followed by both the Colombian and the authorities. An army vehicle was used to transport the protagonists to the police station.

Subsequently, other citizens took up Pardo Ruiz’s chants (more than a thousand, according to the newspaper La Razón,\textsuperscript{15} while the rumor spread that the foreigner had “villainously” murdered a Colombian), calling for revenge with slogans such as “Death to the foreigners” and “Long live Colombians!” This mob stoned every foreign commercial establishment on 7th avenue from 18th street to Plaza de Bolivar. Approximately 44 warehouses suffered damage and, according to the AJC (American Jewish Committee), some Jews were beaten (American Jewish Committee 1946, 251).\textsuperscript{16}

The attackers also pounced on the Israelite Center (the congregation center of the Jewish community, composed of immigrants from Eastern Europe and a few Germans), located on 24th street in front of the National Library, where cultural and religious services were provided to its members. These attackers broke doors and windows. Others went to the synagogue (of the Montefiore congregation composed of German Jews) located on 30th street between 13 and 14th avenues. According to argument of Oscar Gonzales Izquierdo (editor of El Diario Popular), the precise knowledge of the Jewish communities’ religious spaces, which physically did not stand out in the context of the city because they were everyday houses without any distinctive characteristics, suggested that the attack was planned and premeditated in commemoration of the fact that, a year ago, on May 8, 1945, the German forces had surrendered, but that its true purpose was to reinforce antisemitism. Oscar Gonzales Izquierdo stated that “this infamous riot was orchestrated by fascist leaders” (El Diario Popular 1946c, 4).

Some merchants chose to demonstrate their nationalism, with some non-Jewish Colombians holding up signs that read “We are Colombians,” while some merchants of Hebrew origin hoisted the tricolor flag or sang the national anthem. After seeing that their actions were having no effect, the merchants on 7th avenue

\textsuperscript{14} El Siglo’s version is that Fisboim charged Pardo a fee and that the latter was outraged by the way the foreigner made the request.

\textsuperscript{15} Among the attackers, the newspapers highlighted Jaime de la Espriella, José Rafael Pardo, José Manuel Salas, Max Veles, and Pedro Flórez.

\textsuperscript{16} According to El Tiempo, the following stores suffered the most: Gran Droguería, Peletería Siberia, Joyería Paris, El Mensajero, La Confortable, Almacén Berta, Galería Universal, Peletería Francesa, Almacén Holleywood, Almacén Aura, Galería Real, Novedades Europeas, La Dalia, Galería Lafayett, Almacén Granada, J Glottman y Compañía (three display cases), Peletería Riga, Almacén Feniz, Almacén Milan, A. El Encanto, Peletería Selecta, Peletería Canadá, Calzado Orgenal, A. Washington, A. Cecilia, Saad Hermanos, Casa Austria, A. Squire, and A. Extasis y Nena (the last three were owned by non-Jewish Colombians).
closed the doors of their establishments (some of them remained inside), which limited the number of thefts and the destruction of infrastructure. However, estimates for the losses incurred ranged between 17,000 and 30,000 pesos.

At around 7:00 pm, police squads with tear gas dispersed the attackers and calmed the onlookers. In addition, the merchants who had remained locked up left their establishments to go to their homes under the protection of the authorities. Pardo Ruiz was released and given a three-day sick note due to scratches and injuries, while Fisboim’s 72-h detention sentence was commuted, and he was also released. In his statement to the authorities, Pardo Ruiz explained that he had incited the crowd to put an end to those elements that he considered “undesirable” for all Colombians.

The next day, the Jewish-owned warehouses did not open their doors. According to El Espectador, the Jewish victims of the attacks gathered at the Israelite Center and said that they would keep their establishments closed until the Colombian authorities provided them with complete protection to prevent the repeat of such an episode (El Espectador 1946, 1). The authorities complied with these requests. In the United States, five months later, the Boyacá Senator Darío Samper was interviewed on the matter and stated that Colombia was already planning to adopt a non-discriminatory immigration policy that, however, would give preference to people with technical and professional skills useful for industrial
development (American Jewish Committee 1946, 251). This, however, was not clearly reflected in the well-known SS Exodus case that constitutes Echo 3.

Notably, the violence against Jewish traders was almost unanimously repudiated. In the words of El Tiempo (1946b, 1), “The events of last night have been the object of general indignation and protest, since they tend to create racial hatreds, the same ones for whose abolition democratic nations have just waged the most atrocious of wars, exposing those who deny the traditional freedom that has always existed in Colombia.” In this same context, the socialists of El Diario Popular (1946b, 1) explained: “The Democratic Socialist Party protests against the infamous attack on the centers and warehouses of the Hebrews in the city.” They further claimed that these attacks constituted an outbreak of barbarism—a product of the myth of racial antagonisms promoted by Hitler—that was incompatible with the principles of freedom, fraternity, and justice championed by the political constitution.

The journalist Hernando Tellez also spoke out against this, referring to it as of an “unmistakable racist nature that is simply monstrous,” using antisemitic arguments (“Jews, these people say, are undesirable for being hoarders, exploiters, greedy. (…) Jewish violence solves nothing, it has solved nothing, ever”) (El Tiempo 1946a, 4), and concluding that the solution is a restrictive immigration policy. Even El Siglo spoke out vehemently against the Violence against Jewish traders, although it did not attach much importance to it. In its back pages, it referred to this as “an embarrassing act” perpetrated by people without a job who were seeking any opportunity to create a scandal (El Siglo 1946, 12).

The newly elected President of the Republic, Mariano Ospina Pérez opined: “As a convinced democrat I condemn violence, mutiny or revolutionary outbreaks against any race, belief or feeling. The law cannot be injured in any way. Only a legal regime can preside over the life of a civilized and educated people. Its denial would be barbarism” (El Diario Popular 1946d, 1). In this way, the Colombian president expressed his support for the Jewish communities established in the country.

The AJC notes in its archives that, during the conservative government of Mariano Ospina Pérez, the authorities did not maintain their efforts to stop the sporadic attacks against members of the Jewish community, their buildings, and their businesses (Senderey 1948, 271–273). However, an episode such as that of May 8, 1946, was not repeated. Two years later, when the so-called “Bogotazo” broke out, 58 Jewish businesses were burned to the ground and 82 were looted (Senderey 1948, 271); however, this event did not target Jewish communities specifically.

**Echo 3: SS Exodus, 1947**

On July 16, 1947, 4500 Jews, in their desire to escape the memories of the gas chambers and the Nazi crematory ovens, arrived in trucks at the French port of Sete and embarked on the SS Exodus, a 2500-ton river steamer (El Tiempo 1947a, 9). Although their real purpose was to travel to Palestine, they said they were sailing for Colombia.

As the ship approached Palestine, the British Navy attempted to capture it. The passengers resisted and, as a result, 125 were injured. Travelers destroyed their visas...
before they could be verified. The Foreign Office seized the ship and wanted to send
the 4500 Jews to Colombia, given that the French authorities had allowed the embar-
kation because they had seen the consular visas for this country (Semana 1947, 18).

However, 4500 Jews was considered a huge number by the Colombian national
authorities. The Colombian embassy announced in Paris that it would investigate
the case. Carlos Holguín, secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was quick to
declare to the newspaper *El Siglo*:

> Personally, I have the function of authorizing the consuls to issue visas and
> no collective visa has passed through my office, much less for people who are
> trade professionals, because the government, realizing the serious competition
> exercised against Colombian merchants, has severely restricted the immigra-
> tion of these elements. (El Siglo 1947, 1)

Days later, José Solano, the Consul General of Colombia in Marseille, explained
to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that he had only granted 112 visas:

> [...] the said visas have not been granted by this consulate and if they exist they
> are false. [...] In fact it is a more or less serious problem between the French
> and British Governments but, as it could happen that the false news is prop-
> agated, aiming to endorse the 4,500 passengers of the *Exodus* based on the
> principles of humanity (…) I believe the Government of Colombia should not
> accept a single one of these immigrants. (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign
> Affairs, 1947–1948).

The trafficking of counterfeit visas was the argument used by the Colombian
authorities to refuse to grant entry permits to these travelers. In addition, Solano
maintained that, to avoid further inconvenience, the consulate should suspend all
issuance of Israeli visas until the matter of the *SS Exodus* was clarified.

Ambassador Londoño y Londoño also asserted that he “only authorized individ-
ual visas, after studying each case and provided that they are close relatives, such as
parents, children or husbands of residents in Colombia, or people who have useful
professions for the country, such as those of industrial or agricultural technicians”
(El Tiempo 1947b, 1).

While the French insisted that the British send the crew of the *SS Exodus* to the
designated destination, the Jews were denied visas and stated: “We swear we will
never disembark in France. Blood will flow but we will not give up […]. We address
a call to the conscience of all free peoples and express our confidence in the world,
and especially in democratic France.” (El Tiempo 1947b, 1).

The Jews did not want to return to France or go to Colombia, but to reach Pales-
tine. That is why, when a British ship took them back to Europe, only two 50-year-
old crew members wanted to set sail (El Tiempo 1947c, 13); however, the British
authorities forced all passengers to disembark amidst worldwide public outrage.
Ultimately, the voyage of the *SS Exodus* became a symbol—recreated in films and
books—of the will of the Jews to remain in the “holy land” without restrictions. Months after this event, the so-called State of Israel was established, which led to the widespread exodus of Jews around the world to their “promised land.”

**Conclusions**

Ginzburg’s (1989) indiciary paradigm reveals several “indications” (traces, signs, or symptoms) of antisemitic actions during the period from 1945 to 1948, encompassing the materialization of an emerging discourse in Colombia in the 1930s and 1940s, as echoes of what was happening in Europe and even in other countries in Latin America.

It is a product of global discourses that are transferred and adapted to the local level in confluence with close experiences with Jewish immigrants, which constructs the figure of the “Jew” from the reference to otherness, so that he becomes the antipode depending on the place from which he or she is viewed. The “Jew” functions as a kind of scapegoat on which each group concentrates its rejection -and, in these cases, hatred-, in order to deviate from the original focus that makes anger emerge. The economic and nationalist argumentation is the most frequent in the country and the one that argues the materializations of antisemitism mentioned here. In it, the otherness seems to take the blame for the inconsistencies of the national identity and the deficiencies of the economic or social system.

The period began in 1945 with the end of World War II, when the powerful voice that proliferated antisemitism (The Third Reich) began to dissipate gradually. It is clear, however, that this was not the only such voice; antisemitic manifestations continued around the world during the following years, with some even continuing to the present day. The closure of this period in the current study context is 1948, with

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17 See, for example, the 1960 film *Exodus* and the book *Exodus* (Uris 1958).
18 In late 1947, the British requested that the dilemma concerning confrontation between Jews and Arabs in the region of Palestine be overseen by the United Nations. On November 29, the UN General Assembly accepted the recommendations of an international committee for the establishment of two states in Palestine, one Jewish and one Arab (de Lange 1973, 29). The British obeyed and announced their withdrawal from Palestine by May 15, 1948. Although the Arabs declared their absolute resistance, from May 1, the Jews occupied the area assigned to them according to the partition plan. On May 14, at a special meeting of the Provisional Council, David Ben Gurión officially established the State of Israel (*El Tiempo* 1948, 1). Since then, the blue and white flag with the Star of David in the center has been unfurled in the streets of the “promised land.” The diaspora of the “Jewish people” was finally coming to an end.
19 Colombia abstained from voting at the United Nations meeting in 1947 to approve the creation of this country for Jews. In June 1948, the wives and mothers of the Arab Committee asked the president of the Republic not to recognize the State of Israel, as it “undermines the greatness to Palestine, the redemptor cradle of the world whose religion we profess and our children profess” (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1947–1960). However, the Pro-Palestine Committee’s statement, signed by Sanín Cano, maintained that: “a homeland is given to the Jews as an elementary measure of justice, historical reparation and the safeguarding of world peace.” Colombia ultimately recognized the State of Israel on February 2, 1949.
the establishment of the State of Israel, which gradually led to a widespread exodus of Jews around the world to their “promised land.”

It is noteworthy that in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, there were also echoes of the rejection of Jewish populations. In the case of Colombia, with a settled community of 6000 people, three actions are particularly noteworthy: the urban propaganda of 1945; Violence against Jewish traders in 1947; and the debate on mass immigration instigated by the infamous case of the SS Exodus in 1947.

Echo 1 concerns an urban campaign against Jews during 1945 by conspirators who handed out flyers or pamphlets with antisemitic messages. Although the socialist newspaper El Diario Popular was disturbed by this antisemitic wave, it has not been possible to find evidence to support their claim of an organized urban campaign, although this does not mean some such actions did not take place.

Echo 2 concerns the only violence against Jewish traders in Colombian history. It happened in 1946 and culminated in 44 warehouses being destroyed and several Jews being beaten. This elicited a great deal of indignation in the print media of the time, as well as among the country’s leaders, who did not look favorably on this type of action. However, this did not lead to any change in immigration policy in relation to letting these communities from all over the world enter the country.

Echo 3 concerns the renowned case of the SS Exodus (1947), whose 4500 Jewish travelers presented Colombian visas to leave Europe. They actually intended to reach Palestine, not Colombia, leading the Colombian government reiterating its policy of not opening its doors to such a “massive” immigration by people of Hebrew origin.

These three cases are echoes of antisemitism, which did not cease either in Europe or in other parts of the world with the end of the Third Reich. It is clear that our understanding of these echoes could be further deepened through exploration of public and private archives, such as the National Archives of Washington, which contain information gathered by the FBI regarding Nazi or antisemitic activities in South American countries. In Colombia, no further information was found after reviewing documentary sources from local Jewish communities, or journalistic and government archives, regarding antisemitic activities in this context. In addition, by the time this article was submitted, access to these files was restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the initial elucidation of these activities represents a novel contribution. None of these antisemitic actions have been previously acknowledged or described in publications of international scope in the present study’s context. This paper thus contributes to knowledge in the field of history, Jewish communities, and antisemitism studies, with the purpose of commemorating these excluded and contested minorities in this context.

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