

Spanish Jew or Hispanist? Abraham Z. López-Penha and the negotiation of Columbian, Pan-Hispanic, and Sephardic Identity

Elisabeth Bolorinos Allard

**Medieval and Modern Languages, University of Oxford, Oxford,
United Kingdom**

Elisabeth.bolorinosallard@magd.ox.ac.uk

Dr. Bolorinos Allard is a Research Fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford.

Her forthcoming book, *Enemies or brothers? Defining Spanish identity in relation to Muslim and Jewish cultures in colonial Morocco* (Woodbridge, Tamesis, 2020) compares Spanish visual and textual portrayals of Muslim and Jewish cultures in the early twentieth century, drawing out questions about Spain's own cultural identity that emerged as a result of its colonial ventures.

Spanish Jew or Hispanist? Abraham Z. López-Penha and the negotiation of Columbian, Pan-Hispanic, and Sephardic Identity

This article explores the negotiation of Sephardic, Columbian, and Hispanic identity in the writing and correspondence of Abraham Zacharías López-Penha (1865-1927), a Colombian writer of Sephardic Jewish Curaçaoan origin.

Focusing on his most acclaimed work, *El libro de las incoherencias* (1909), it questions why, as a Columbian writer, López-Penha chooses to identify himself as a 'Spanish Jew', particularly in the context of his relationship with the founder of Spanish Philosephardism, Ángel Pulido. It also questions how López-Penha's Sephardic identity fits within the discourse of Spanish-American hispanism, particularly its racial parameters.

Keywords: Abraham Z. López-Penha, Sephardic Jews, Philosephardism, race, Latin American cultural studies

In *Espanoles sin patria y la raza sefardí* (1905), the study of Sephardic culture that lay the foundations for the Philosephardic movement in Spain, the Spanish physician and senator Ángel Pulido introduces the Columbian Sephardic writer Abraham Z. López-Penha as follows:

Escritor castellano de buena cepa, fecundo novelista y poeta inspirado, autor de libros importantes, impresos en Barcelona para mayor atestiguar a su amor por España, es el Sr D. Abraham Z López-Penha, a quien presentamos, el cual nos produjo gratísimas impresiones con sus preciosos envíos literarios, unos impresos, otros manuscritos, y todos de mérito para acreditarle como un noble literato.¹

(I present to you D. Abraham Z. López-Penha, a Castilian writer of good stock and an inspired novelist and poet who has published important works in Barcelona to demonstrate his love for Spain. The precious literary works he has sent us, some of them in print, others as manuscripts, have made a profound impression on us and have more than demonstrated his credentials as a noble man of letters.)

Pulido's description of López-Penha as a Castilian writer is surprising given the fact that López-Penha was originally from the Caribbean island of Curaçao and his native tongue was not Spanish but Dutch and Papiamentu. However, after re-locating to

Barranquilla in 1887 as part of a wave of Curaçaoan Jewish emigration to Columbia at the end of the century, López-Penha fervently embraced literary production and literary culture in Spanish as the means of expressing his Colombian —and more widely Hispanic — identity. One of the first openly practicing Jews to make a contribution to Hispanic American letters,² he published two novels and three volumes of poetry over the course of his life, edited the literary magazine *La Revista Azul*, and co-founded the newspaper *El Siglo*. He opened a library and bookshop to bring the latest works of literature published in Spain to Barranquilla and corresponded with some of Spain's most prominent intellectuals of the time, including Gaspar Núñez de Arce, Miguel de Unamuno, Emilia Pardo Bazán, and Ángel Pulido. In fact, with the exception of his first volume of poetry, which is dedicated to his brother David, all of his writing is dedicated to Spanish writers. In the introduction to his most acclaimed work, *El libro de las incoherencias* (1909), López-Penha dedicates the text 'in gratitude and admiration' to Ángel Pulido, and identifies himself using a term coined by Pulido: *judío español*.³

In his high regard for the Spanish Peninsular literary legacy as well as his desire to contribute to the articulation of modern Colombian identity through his writing, López-Penha represents the quintessential fin-de-siècle *hispanista*. Among their multitude of academic and cultural meanings, the terms *hispanista* and *hispanismo* apply to the cultural identities that emerged as a result of Spanish colonisation and continue to evolve across national and cultural boundaries in Latin America.

Hispanismo appears in the early eighteenth century as a term denoting cultured speech and poetic expression,⁴ and over the course of the nineteenth century it expands into a concept that refers to the transnational community of Spanish speaking cultures, 'la Hispanidad'. It has acted as an interpretative and representational cultural model for Latin American and Spanish cultural history and has served contradictorily to legitimise

Spanish hegemony in a colonial and post-colonial context, in particular playing a key role in Francoist imperial discourse in the twentieth century, and to reject it in favour of a process of cultural regeneration arising from within Latin America, as newly independent nations began to cast off the Spain's influence. Despite their wide-ranging political and ideological inclinations, hispanist intellectuals on both the 'old' and the 'new' continent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embraced certain common principles: they celebrated exchanges and fusions between cultures rather than exalting cultural purity, and they posited language as the highest unifying factor between Spanish-speaking nations and literature as a key form of expression of national and pan-national identities. The Spanish philosopher and writer Miguel de Unamuno, who devoted himself to theorising the pan-Hispanic community perhaps more than any other intellectual of this period, expressed this ideal of belonging as follows: 'La sangre de mi espíritu es mi lengua, y mi patria es allí donde resuena soberano su verbo' (The blood of my spirit is my language, and my homeland is wherever its word resounds).⁵

Hoping to maintain some form of cultural hegemony in the Americas after the loss of Cuba and the Philippines in the war of 1898, Spanish hispanists claimed that a powerful 'spiritual' bond existed between all Spanish-speaking cultures and that all Hispanic nations would benefit from strengthening this bond through a mutual process of cultural exchange. Once Spain had definitively lost its influence as a colonial power, Latin American intellectuals like López-Penha began to subscribe to this Spanish version of hispanism out of a desire to defend Hispanic culture in the face of the rise of United States hegemony in America, drawn to the idea of a spiritual community without structures of political or economic domination. A new exaltation of *hispanidad* was taken on by the burgeoning movement of Spanish American *modernismo* and formed part of the literary and political discourses of prominent intellectuals like the Cuban

poet and nationalist José Martí, the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó, and the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío, widely considered to be the founding figure in the movement. The celebration of hybridity and its regenerative potential in terms of culture emerges parallel to the integration of the concept of *mestizaje* in the nationalist discourses of the newly independent Republics as way of constructing a common hybrid Latin American ethnic identity in the face of ‘white’ European and North American races.⁶ The language of *mestizaje* is applied to literature, for example, by the Mexican *modernista* Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera in an essay written in 1894:

Ahora bien, entiendo que esta decadencia de la poesía lírica española, depende por decirlo así, de la falta de cruzamiento. La aversión a lo extranjero ha sido maléfica para España: dígalos, si no, la expulsión de los judíos. Es falso que el sol no se pone jamás en los dominios de nuestra antigua metrópoli: el sol sale y se pone en muchos países y conviene procurar ver todo lo que se alumbra. Conserve cada raza su carácter substancial; pero no se aísle de las otras ni las rechace.⁷

(Now, I understand that the decadence of Spanish lyrical poetry was caused by a lack of miscegenation. The aversion to all things foreign has been detrimental to Spain; take for instance the expulsion of the Jews. It is not true that the sun never sets on the territories of our past metropolis, the sun rises and sets in many countries and we should look upon all that it illuminates. Each race should preserve its essential qualities but should not isolate itself from other races nor reject them.)

Unamuno and Nájera’s references to race (in Unamuno’s case the use of a racial metaphor) are worth noting because the discourse of hispanism develops within the highly racialised context of the Latin American Republics. The separation of indigenous Americans and individuals of Peninsular descent into two separate commonwealths by the Spanish colonial administration from the sixteenth century onwards,⁸ the exclusion of individuals of African descent that had arrived in the Americas through the slave trade from both of these categories, and the uncertain status of a growing population of *mestizos* and *mulatos* of mixed ethnicity essentially produced a caste system in which European heritage became the primary source of social and political power in Latin American society. Furthermore, concepts of ‘blood purity’ that had been applied in the

Peninsula against Muslim and Jewish converts to Christianity were transferred to the new world in policies that excluded individuals of American indigenous or African descent from administrative, educational, military, and ecclesiastic institutions.⁹ Although they claimed to elevate language over ethnicity in the formulation of national and pan-national identities, the hispanists did not challenge this system of racial stratification, but rather celebrated and fostered an intellectual community that was made up of men of European descent and a literary legacy produced by individuals of their own gender and ethnicity.

Nájera's reference to the Iberian Jews is also significant because Sephardic Jews occupied a distinct position within the idealised pan-Hispanic community. The Sephardi had linguistic ties to the Iberian Peninsula, like other Latin Americans, but they also had deep historical and cultural roots because of the prominent role of Jewish intellectuals in the vibrant cosmopolitan society that had flourished in medieval Iberia. Their cultural and ethnic ties to Spain were the subject of a wide range of theories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as racial science became fundamentally integrated into discourses of nationalism. In terms of López-Penha's contemporaries, some Spanish historians, like José Amador de los Ríos, portrayed the Jews ambiguously as protagonists in the development of Spanish civilisation but as racially distinct from Spaniards;¹⁰ while others, like Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, saw them as an alien culture and race alongside the Muslims against which the Spanish nation and more widely Hispanic culture were forged.¹¹ On the other hand, Ángel Pulido and the intellectuals that followed in his wake believed that the racial and cultural degeneration of Spain was the direct result of the expulsion of the Jews in 1492.¹² Pulido's Philosephardic movement, which gained the support of prominent Spanish intellectuals in the first decades of the twentieth century and in particular proto-fascist writers like

Ernesto Giménez Caballero and Agustín de Foxá, sought to re-establish racial, cultural, and commercial ties with ‘Spanish’ Jews scattered across the world for the sake of revitalising the Spanish nation.¹³ It emerged parallel to hispanism and saw the Sephardi as the key bearers and transmitters of Spain’s cultural legacy and as ‘witnesses and advocates of a greater Spanish patria beyond Spain’s national borders’.¹⁴ Therefore, the term ‘Spanish Jew’, which was used by Pulido to describe the descendants of the Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula and scattered across the world in the twentieth century, had a multitude of ethnic and cultural connotations that were often ambiguous and conflicting. Originating from one of the oldest Jewish communities in Latin America,¹⁵ which had long coexisted alongside the Afro-Caribbean population of Curaçao, López-Penha no doubt had a heightened awareness of these connotations and their significance to the racial dynamics of Latin American societies. Therefore López-Penha’s use of the term, particularly in light of his relationship with Ángel Pulido, is a central concern of this article.

This article contributes to recent scholarship that has highlighted Sephardic identity as an example of the multi-ethnic, intercultural, distinctly modern identities that are articulated within the framework of *fin-de-siècle* hispanism.¹⁶ As well as forming part of the discourse of Peninsular hispanists, Sepharad provides a framework for non-Sephardic as well as Sephardic Jewish Latin American intellectuals to articulate their Hispanic identity. Edna Eizenberg has shown how writers like Alberto Gerchunoff, Carlos Grunberg, and more recently Juan Gelman and Marcos Aguinis use the Sephardic heritage as an ‘acculturative tool’ to link Judaism and hispanism, creating their own Sephardic mythology for their identity as Hispanic Jews or ‘neo-Sephardi’.¹⁷ This process allows them to marry otherwise divergent linguistic, cultural, historical, ethnic, and religious expressions of identity and legitimise their cultural heritage both

within their national contexts and within the pan-national Hispanic community. However, within this area of scholarship the Caribbean Sephardi have not generated much interest despite their unique historical and linguistic context. One exception of Paula Dacarett's recent article on López-Penha, which highlights how the Spanish language and letters threaded together his affinities and loyalties to the Hispanic Americas, Spain and 'Sephardicity'.¹⁸ By focusing on López-Penha's writing and correspondence, this article seeks to address an understudied area, which is the engagement of Latin American Sephardic intellectuals with Philosephardism in its early stages, and specifically with Ángel Pulido's campaign. Furthermore, although scholars have examined the ethnic categories created for the Jews by Spanish Philosephardites, I hope to probe the question further of how Sephardic writers engaged with these racial parameters and positioned themselves within the racial and gendered paradigms of Philosephardism, hispanism, and Latin American nationalist movements.

Over the course of his life, López-Penha published three volumes of poetry: *Cromos* (1895), *El libro de las incoherencias* (1909), and *Varios a varios* (1910); and two novels: *Camila Sánchez* (1897) and *La desposada de una sombra* (1903). His use of nature, beauty, and classical mythology as poetic themes, as well as Alexandrine metric and symbolist language and motifs (the swan, the fleur de lis) suggests that López-Penha sought to align himself with the vanguard movement of Spanish-American *modernismo*, and to some extent he succeeded in doing so. In 1894 the Venezuelan writer and editor Nicanor Bolet Peraza locates López-Penha among Latin America's up and coming *modernista* writers,¹⁹ and the Columbian literary critic from Barranquilla Julio H. Palacio praises the publication of *Cromos* in 1895 as the arrival of an 'ultramodernist' poet to the world of Indo-American letters.²⁰ However, although he maintained friendships with prominent figures in the movement like Darío and Enrique

Gómez Carrillo, his work never achieved great prominence. For instance, the literary critic Max Henríquez Ureña describes him as a mediocre poet;²¹ and in his history of the literary circle of Barranquilla, Ramón Illán Bacca calls him ‘a modernist by force,’ arguing that his work bears more of the influence of the earlier Peninsular poets Joaquín Bartrina, Gaspar Nuñez de Arce, and Ramón de Campoamor than Latin American vanguard writers like Rubén Darío or José Asunción Silva.²²

Regardless of his status as a modernist writer, López-Penha’s cultivation of the forms and themes associated with Spanish-American modernism is relevant in light of current criticism’s view of the heterogeneous texts of the *modernistas* as part of the creation of a new literary language that contributed to the representation of national cultural identities.²³ The quest for a national art and literature was a grand continental theme from the birth of the independence movements of the early nineteenth century and the mission of South American Romantic writers like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Andrés Bello. In fact there are echoes of Bello in the neo-classical, measured, and impersonal style of López-Penha’s poems, particularly in his exaltation of Columbian natural landscapes as virginal and uncharted, evoking the unfinished world of Genesis.

Take for instance the poem ‘Al río Magdalena’ from *El libro de las incoherencias* (1909) [see appendix 1]. This river was vital for the Columbian economy because it connected the interior of the country to the Atlantic through Barranquilla, and like the Mississippi in the United States, it became a powerful symbol of the national community. In comparing the Magdalena to the Euphrates of an unexplored Eden, López-Penha follows the American Romantic tradition of portraying the wilderness of the continent as paradisiacal, representing a return to a symbolic, uncorrupted beginning upon which new national identities could be constructed. At the same time the poem shows a typically *modernista* interest in revaluing an indigenous, pre-Christian and pre-

Columbine heritage. Written as an ode, the poet presents nature as an object of worship, as it would have been for indigenous cultures, makes reference to the ‘errant’ souls of tribal chiefs (*caciques*), and represents both the nation and the river as a temple and a sanctuary. The metaphor of the river as a serpent is an allusion to the Biblical understanding of sin, which is what paganism represented to the Spanish conquistadores. Significantly, *la Magdalena* is personified in proud resistance to ‘Hispanic’ colonial conquest, and López-Penha asks the question, ‘¿Podrán las nuevas razas de blondas cabelleras / resucitar los siglos de Hastings ó Cortés? (Will the new fair-headed races / be able to resurrect the era of Hastings or Cortés?).²⁴ These fair-headed races, clearly a reference to the United States, are López-Penha’s version of Rodó’s Caliban, the beast of Anglo-American materialism and imperialism that hispanists saw emerging as a threat in the wake of the Spanish American war of 1898.²⁵ They also show López-Penha’s awareness of contemporary racial theories and their role in discourses of colonial power. As a serpent-river directly facing the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico and the United States, the Magdalen river represents a guardian not only of the Columbian nation but also of the entire Hispanic continent against a new force of colonial conquest.

Most of the poems in *El libro de las incoherencias* deal with Columbian national identity and the volume closes triumphantly with a patriotic ode, ‘Mi única marcha’, a celebration of liberal nationalism and scientific positivism that again uses nature to represent the Columbian homeland. In her work on the Mexican Sephardic community, Devi Mays has shown how Sephardic immigrants in Latin America performed and acquired national as well as transnational identities to serve their social and economic interests.²⁶ López-Penha’s poetry here clearly represents a declaration of Columbian patriotism, perhaps with the aim of positioning himself among Columbia’s *modernista*

vanguard, perhaps out of a desire to contribute to the cultural process of ‘imagining’ the Columbian nation,²⁷ and perhaps out of a sincerely fervent allegiance to his adopted homeland. However, *El libro de las incoherencias* does not begin with a reference to Columbia but with a nod to López-Penha’s Sephardic Jewish identity. Written under López-Penha’s name in the opening pages is the identification ‘Spanish Jew’, and the first poem, ‘Rúaj Col’, stands thematically and formally in isolation to the others and is written in ballad form, a clear reference to Sephardic Iberian culture (see appendix 2).

‘Rúaj Col’ consists of a direct and rather bizarre warning to the reader that echoes the oral tradition in which the *Romancero viejo* was performed. The tradition of oral performance, which originated in medieval Iberia, was preserved by Sephardic Jewish communities across the world and continued to have an important role in social and family functions into the twentieth century.²⁸ The poem also imitates the medieval Iberian ballad tradition in its form (octosyllabic verses) and in the use of archaic nouns and verb tenses. The warning to avoid ‘el dichoso libro’ (‘the cursed book’ of poetry) is cryptic and full of juxtaposing statements and images connected by the conjunction of choice, ‘ó’ (or). We are told that the book is neither for sages nor fools, ‘beasts’ nor learned men, that those who ignore the warning and read it do so either out of recklessness or foolishness, and that the consequences of doing so are to be taken by the Devil or rewarded by God. Finally, the poet will share the reader’s fate, *por intonso* (unshaven) ó *pecador* (sinner). The image of an unshaven heretic is an unmistakeable allusion to the Jew as a marginal figure in a Christian society. Furthermore, it is the ambiguity of the address and its juxtapositions that represent the identity conflict historically imposed on Jews (learned men often occupying elite positions in society, yet accused of being heretical ‘beasts’) and *conversos* (sages to Christians, fools to Jews). The repeated ‘ó’ echoes the constant duality of identity that must have been

experienced by López-Penha in his own Latin American multicultural context. There is also a self-conscious undertone to his introduction to this ‘strange book’, as if López-Penha feels the need to justify why, as a Sephardic Jew from Curaçao, he is contributing to a literary representation of the Columbian nation.

This *romance* represents the only instance in which López-Penha makes any allusion to Jewishness in his writing, unlike other prominent Latin American Jewish intellectuals of the period, such as Alberto Gerchunoff and Carlos Grunberg, who make it a central theme in their work. The fact that it serves as an introduction to a collection of poems that are concerned with Columbian and not Jewish identity, alongside the title and formal disjointedness of *El libro de las incoherencias*, suggests that it is an expression of the poet’s own cultural miscegenation or *cruzamiento*. As mentioned previously, cultural hybridity was celebrated by hispanists on both sides of the Atlantic and *modernista* writers drew on a range of cultural influences in their writing. On the other hand, López-Penha’s use of the Sephardic literary tradition to articulate his distinctly modern, hybrid identity subverts the predominant image among Spanish scholars of Sephardic Jews as a nostalgic relic from the past, a subversion I will discuss in more detail further on.

Secondly, the title ‘Rúaj Col’, (ruaj is Hebrew for ‘wind’ or ‘spirit’, and col ‘voice’ or ‘everything’) as well as the cryptic warning at the end of the poem, allude to the concept of crypto-Jewish identity, which had existed since colonial times in the Americas as a pervasive yet covert cultural legacy. Though their numbers are unknown because their identity was concealed, Jews, converted Jews, and descendants of converted Jews from Spain and Portugal fleeing the Inquisition were among the early European colonisers arriving in Latin America and the Caribbean in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and their legacy includes significant historical and literary figures

such as Luis de Caravajal and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. In the early modern period, the Sephardi of the Dutch Caribbean, though less persecuted than those in Spanish America, also steered between crypto-Jewish and Jewish status.²⁹ The financing for Columbus' first voyage was provided by the *conversos* Luis de Santángel and Gabriel Sanchez, King Ferdinand's general treasurer, and Columbus' first letter home was to these patrons.³⁰ The theory that Columbus himself was a crypto-Jew and that the Americas provided a place for Jews to escape persecution on the Peninsula, though impossible to demonstrate, was often referred to in Jewish Latin American publications during this period.³¹ For instance, a Jewish journal in Peru claimed: 'No será aventurado asegurar que en las venas de muchísimos peruanos fluye la sangre de aquellos judíos [expulsados de España] que han sido absorbidos por las mayorías del país, asimilándose por completo, sin dehar huella visible de su existencia' (it would not be an exaggeration to claim that the blood of those Jews expelled from Spain flows in the veins of many Peruvians, having been absorbed by the majority of the country and fully assimilated, leaving no trace of their existence).³²

The explicit reference to blood in the above article signals another possible motive for López-Penha to incorporate his Sephardic heritage into his writing. Within the racial hierarchy of Latin American society during the colonial period, Spanishness (and Europeaness in general) came to be equated with whiteness and with belonging to the social and cultural elite. Conversely, blackness was systematically associated with slavery, racial impurity, and low social standing.³³ Within this racial stratification, crypto-Jews and *conversos* in the Americas, who on the Peninsula had been regarded as tainted in relation to 'old' Christians, moved into the category of 'old' as opposed to 'new' Spaniards, thus occupying the 'white' racial and cultural category. As a member of the Curaçaoan Sephardic community, which was established in the mid-seventeenth

century by Jews from present-day Spain and Portugal who had fled to Holland after their exile from the Iberian Peninsula, López-Penha could claim among the earliest ancestral ties to Iberia of any Latin American community. His desire to emphasize these ties through both his paternal and maternal family line may also explain his use of the two names in hyphenated form: the Castilian version of the first (López) and the Portuguese version of the second (Penha rather than Peña). Presumably in Curaçao he would have only used one family name, so the use of both López and Penha serves Hispanicise his identity in the context of Columbia as well as to emphasise his Iberian ancestry.

Despite their elite status, the Jews of Curaçao represented a marginal ethnic and religious group that had to negotiate their place within the boundaries of a dramatically racialised slave society. Alongside the Dutch protestant administrators and landowners, the Sephardi had become part of the elite class of the island, while most of the population consisted of African slaves and their descendants, and yet the community only obtained emancipation in 1825.³⁴ Likewise, although to a much lesser extent than occurred in the Spanish American colonies, intermixing did take place between Caribbean Jews and African slaves, creating an in-between category of ‘new world’ or ‘Creole Jews’.³⁵ The primary language spoken by Curaçaoan Jews was Papiamentu, a mix of Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, the indigenous language *arahuaca*, and a variety of African languages, a further manifestation of their hybridity.³⁶ The term derives from the Spanish verb *papear*, which is akin to ‘jibberish’ in English, reflecting Spanish disdain for the mixing that took place, both racial and cultural, in the colonies. As Lewis Gordon has noted, the participation of Jews in the history of colonialism and slavery unsettles the racial and social categories that Jews are often placed in.³⁷ López-Penha’s actual ethnic background, which is unknown, is not relevant here, what is

relevant is his awareness of these fluctuating boundaries and his desire to ‘whiten’ his identity by taking on the label of ‘Spanish Jew’.

Considering the above reflections, it is not surprising then that *El libro de las incoherencias* is dedicated to Ángel Pulido. Since the birth of the practice of book printing and publishing, dedications have served to acknowledge a relationship of importance to the author, primarily either a friendship, a patronage relationship, or a new relationship with a esteemed figure that might enhance the author’s credibility.³⁸ The dedication to Pulido is particularly significant because of his glorification of ‘Spanish Jews’ in *Espanoles sin patria y la raza sefardí* (1905), his monumental study of Sephardic communities across the world. Pulido was not a man of letters but a scientist; he served as the first secretary of Spain’s anthropological society and mentored Spain’s most influential anthropologists of the time, Manuel Antón and Luis de Hoyos Sáinz.³⁹ He became interested in the Sephardic Jews after a trip in the Balkans in 1903, fascinated by the fact that over two million Jews spread around the world still spoke Judeo-Spanish after 400 years of exile. Like the *hispanistas*, Pulido held the Romantic view of language as a reflection of the *volk* or ‘spirit’ of a people and believed that as Spanish-speakers, the Sephardi belonged to the Hispanic ethno-cultural community. He did not represent them as distinct communities that had been formed by various cultural contexts since their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula and had developed intersectional cultural and national identities, but rather as a sort of time capsule that had been preserved, uncorrupted for centuries, of medieval Castilian culture. Furthermore, as the title of his study indicates, he believed the Sephardic Jews remained profoundly nostalgic for Spain, the homeland they had lost but still considered their *patria*. This narrative of Sephardic identity shaped the Spanish Philosephardic movement and the ideas of its most prominent figures in the 1920s, including the

scholar of Hebrew studies Manuel Ortega and the fascist ideologue Ernesto Giménez Caballero. One of the singular features of Spanish fascism in its incipient stages is its philosephardic tendencies, in contrast to the anti-Semitism that characterized other European fascist movements and that became integral to Francoism from the Spanish Civil War onwards. Pulido's writing on the Sephardi was particularly influential among early fascist thinkers in Spain, especially Giménez Caballero, who made them the foundation for his initial vision for the racial regeneration of the Spanish nation.⁴⁰

Pulido saw the Sephardi not only as an uncorrupted Castilian cultural identity but also as an uncorrupted race. In the context of early twentieth century Spain and Latin America, the term *raza* was often used to refer to the Hispanic cultural and linguistic community rather than biological identity, however, as an anthropologist, Pulido uses the term in a biological sense. He praises the 'admirable purity' of Judeo-Spanish, portraying it as pure form of the Spanish spoken in medieval Castile, as well as the purity of the Sephardic race, which had for the most part avoided 'intermixing with other races' in the areas they had come to inhabit.⁴¹ He goes even further in arguing that because the first Jews arrived in Spain along with the Phoenicians around 800 BC, the Sephardi were in fact more racially 'pure' than most modern Spaniards.⁴² In his view, Spain's degeneration from the sixteenth century onwards was the direct result of the expulsion of the Jews. For these reasons, re-establishing ties with the Sephardi would allow Spain to achieve regeneration, which for him was not only a process of cultural revitalization but also one of racial purification through fusion with the Sephardi.

In *Españoles sin patria*, Pulido documents Sephardic communities across the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, and the Americas, highlighting distinguished 'Spanish Jews' within each one. The fact that the section on the Columbian Sephardi features López-Penha shows Pulido's view of him as exemplary of the Sephardic 'race'. In his

correspondence with López-Penha, Pulido sends him articles on his Philosephardic campaign asking for feedback and expresses his delight that a Spanish Jew, ‘domine tan galardemente mi lengua y contribuya a enriquecer su literature con tan hermosas producciones’ (should dominate my language so skilfully and enriching my literature with such beautiful works).⁴³ The fact that he describes the Spanish language as his and not López-Penha’s betrays the fact that as Ojeda Mata has recently argued, Pulido, and Spanish Philosephardites in general, separated Spanish identity from the Sephardi, making the relationship one of affiliation rather than full identification.⁴⁴

However, López-Penha’s correspondence conversely reveals a certain degree of ambivalence towards Spain. In a letter to Pulido reprinted in *Españoles sin patria*, López-Penha refers to Spain’s ‘past glory’, emphasizing the long decline of its cultural and commercial influence on the American continent.⁴⁵ He writes from a position of superiority, regarding Latin America and not Spain as the place where economic growth, modernisation and cultural revitalisation is taking place. In terms of the sentiments of the Barranquilla Jewish community towards Spain, he writes that few are interested in Pulido’s Philosephardic campaign. He also dismisses the notion of Sephardic nostalgia for the long-lost homeland, declaring: ‘es algo entibiada la vieja predilección por España, —obra del tiempo, y acaso también de las libertades de que en estos países se goza’ (our fondness for Spain has grown somewhat lukewarm due to the passing of time and the freedoms that we enjoy in these [Latin American] nations).⁴⁶ He does however encourage Pulido’s aim to establish commercial ties with the Colombian Sephardi, suggesting that due to their wealth and high social standing, they would serve as ideal commercial intermediaries in new trade agreements.

Why then does López-Penha choose to identify himself as Spanish Jew? As my analysis of his writing has shown, his *patria* is Columbia not Spain, and he does not

invoke the archaic medieval culture that Pulido projects onto the Sephardic Jews, but rather uses the Sephardic legacy to cultivate a literary identity aligned with the modern, cosmopolitan movement of Spanish-American *modernismo*. But Pulido's use of the term 'Spanish Jew' refers to an uncorrupted ethno-linguistic identity within the culturally diverse community of la *Hispanidad*, and as I have suggested earlier, it is this legacy that López-Penha wants to claim for himself in the highly racialised context of Latin American society.

In *Españoles sin patria*, Pulido notes that in some cases, 'mezcla de la raza y degeneración del idioma' (racial mixing and degeneration of the Spanish language) had occurred among the Sephardi. The fact that in his view the two go hand in hand reveals the close relationship between race and language that exists in the European imagination. From the early modern period, writing and the production of 'literature', based on a European understanding of the concept, was taken as evidence of the superiority of certain 'races', and the presence or absence of written language was used to designate racial difference. For example, in his *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (1590), the Spanish Jesuit scholar José de Acosta asserted that 'not a single nation of Indians discovered in the Americas times used proper letters or writing,' using this as the basis to establish three categories of barbarism for the native cultures of the Americas.⁴⁷ Even when there was no mention of the concept of race itself, the existence of racial difference based on literary culture and writing was implicit. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes:

Once the concept of value became encased in the belief in a canon of texts whose authors purportedly shared a common culture, inherited from both the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, there was no need to speak of matters of race, since the race of these authors was 'the same'. One not heir to these traditions was, by definition, of another race.⁴⁸

Pulido's statement about linguistic and racial degeneration brings to mind the context of Curaçao, where Papiamentu and not Spanish was the primary language spoken among the Sephardi. As a Sephardic Jew, López-Penha is already located within Pulido's category of racial purity, but in order to further affirm his identity as a Spanish Jew, perhaps out of anxiety over his own linguistic heritage, López-Penha emphasizes to Pulido his great love for the Spanish literary canon in the biographical notes he sends to Pulido for *Espanoles sin patria*,⁴⁹ which Pulido includes in his study because they fit his image of Sephardic loyalty to Spain perfectly:

Su padre le puso a leer a los siete años obras españolas, á las cuales se aficionó con pasión tan desmedida, que cuando aquel dejaba por alguna razón de procurarle libros, reusaba alimentarse y no se dejaba consolar [...] huía del trato con los compañeros. Siempre por leer las obras de Cervantes, Pérez Galdós, Valdés, etc.⁵⁰

(His father introduced him to Spanish literature at the age of seven, and he took to it with such great passion that when for any reason he was not able to obtain books, he stopped eating and was inconsolable [...] withdrawing from all social interaction. All for the sake of reading the works of Pérez Galdós, Palacio Valdés, etc.)

By making himself heir to the Hispanic language and literary traditions, López-Penha is attempting to assert his place as a member of the Hispanic 'race' before those *hispanistas* who did not speak explicitly of race, like Pulido did, but who established the limits of the Hispanic community by means of a common culture originating in the Spanish literary tradition.

Penha's intention of asserting his ethno-linguistic belonging is further supported by the dedication of the aforementioned patriotic poem, 'Mi única marcha', to the Andalusian journalist and writer Isaac Muñoz. As a novelist, Muñoz was part of the young generation of Spanish writers profoundly influenced by Darío's decadent and symbolist style and a pioneer of what Andrée Bachoud has termed 'colonial Africanist literature', a sub-genre of Spanish Orientalism that would later flourish under

Francoism.⁵¹ As a journalist, Muñoz regularly wrote articles for the liberal newspaper *El heraldo* in support of Spain's colonialist mission in North Africa, a support grounded in his conviction in the need for miscegenation. In his view, the Spanish race has degenerated precisely because of the recent lack of vital mixing that had characterised earlier moments in its history, particularly the period of al-Andalus, and the colonisation of Morocco would provide for a mutually beneficial re-injection of 'Moorish' and 'Jewish' blood into the Spanish race.⁵²

The dedication of López-Penha's last work, *Varios a varios* (1910)⁵³ to the Spanish literary giant and *hispanista* Miguel de Unamuno is also worth noting. Unlike the neo-imperial narrative of hispanism that begins to emerge in Spain during this period, Unamuno emphasised that the Spanish language and culture belonged to all of the nations, ethnicities, and faiths that claimed it as their own.⁵⁴ The principle of cultural 'co-penetration', which underlies his writing on *la Hispanidad* and responds to Najera's idea of *cruzamiento*, invites the articulation of hybrid, modern identities like López-Penha's:

Tenemos que acabar de perder los españoles todo lo que se encierra en eso de madre patria, y comprender que para salvar la cultura hispánica nos es preciso entrar a trabajarla de par con los pueblos americanos, y recibiendo de ellos, no sólo dándoles.⁵⁵

(As Spaniards, we need to definitively let go of the confining notion of madre patria and understand that in order to save Hispanic culture it is necessary to work alongside the American nations, not only giving but also receiving from them.)

This view of the pan-Hispanic community surely resonated with López-Penha, based on the aforementioned ideas he expressed to Pulido. In addition, Unamuno had a longstanding interest in the Sephardic Jews. He participated in Pulido's movement and in the foundation of the Alianza Hispano-Israelí (Hispano-Israelite Alliance) in 1908, and like other Spanish philologists of his time he was fascinated by the Judeo-Spanish ballads, regarding them as repositories of a 'spiritual' essence of Spanish culture. In his

correspondence with López-Penha, Unamuno writes, that his self-identification as a Spanish Jew had ‘clarified many things’, a statement that, though unclear, suggests that he held a positive view of López-Penha and his cultural legacy.⁵⁶

Aizenberg, Halevi-Wise, and Dacarett have shown how Sepharad provides a framework for non-Sephardic as well as Sephardic Jewish Latin American intellectuals from the nineteenth century to the present to articulate their Hispanic identity. As a Caribbean Sephardic Jew who emigrates to Columbia and establishes himself, arguably, as a *modernista* writer who contributes to the literary imagining of Columbian national identity, López-Penha embodies the cross-cultural and cross-continental identities that were emerging in the modernising independent nations of Latin America at the turn of the past century. Like other Latin American Jewish authors from the period such as Gerchunoff and Grunberg, López-Penha uses the Sephardic legacy to legitimise his cultural heritage both within his national context and within the pan-national Hispanic community. However, López-Penha’s decision to identify himself as a ‘Spanish Jew’, a term that has narrower cultural and ethnic parameters than the term ‘Sephardi’, runs the risk of clashing with his identity as a cosmopolitan hispanist and as a Columbian nationalist. I have argued that he uses the term order to claim racial and linguistic legitimacy as a *hispanista*, seeking to belong to a community that, though not explicitly racial, idealised an intellectual and cultural legacy produced almost exclusively by men of Spanish Peninsular origin. The fact that he dedicates his work to intellectuals who showed a high regard not only for the role of Sephardic Iberia in the formation of Spanish culture but also for the Sephardic ‘race’ in a biological sense further supports this argument. Perhaps he does this out of an anxiety about the ‘whiteness’ of his ethno-linguistic heritage as a native of Curaçao, perhaps it is merely to serve his interests in cultivating a transnational literary network and positioning himself among the

prominent Hispanic intellectuals of his time is unclear. Either way, López-Penha's negotiation of identity reveals the underlying and overlapping racial paradigms of Spanish-American hispanism, Philosephardism, and incipient fascism and cultural nationalism in the early twentieth century.

Appendix 1. 'Al río Magdalena'

En las edades de oro, cuando reinó Pomona
Bajo el azul divino del cielo de Platón,
No tuvo regalías ni flores su corona
Cual sobre gualda y gules ostentas por blasón

Tus finas esmeraldas al borde de las ondas
valen lo que cien Muzos y lo que Alaskas cien.
¡Ay de ti sí las razas de caballeras blondas
sospechan que eres Éufrates del inexplorado Edén!

Solos están tus cármenes, solas están tus vegas:
Imperas sobre un mundo de olvido y soledad;
Y un aura de leyendas te sigue; adonde llegas,
Si canta la oropéndola, también ruge el jaguar.

Y pasa la tormenta, y como á grácil caña
Siega cien altos robles que el tiempo veneró;
Se inflama el aire, tiembla medrosa la montaña,
Y al trueno de los cielos responde otro mayor.

Y allí donde ciudades de nobles esperanzas
Alzaron nuevos templos á un ideal mejor,
Monstruosas breñas yerguen sus erizadas lanzas,
Y sus robustas lianas enreda el constrictor.

Extrañas orquídeas de cálidos cambiantes
En los podridos troncos encienden su coral,
Como votivos cirios que las almas errantes
De tus pobres caciques cuelgan ante tu altar;

Y flota en el silencio, dijérase que una
Como de extintas cosas, tierna, olvidada voz;
Que manos invisibles en los claros de luna
Sobre las aguas trémulas están diciendo ¡adiós!

¹ ¡Oh hermoso y fuerte río! ¡Contra tus olas fieras
luchó el coraje hispano y venció tu altivez!
¿Podrán las nuevas razas de blondas cabelleras
resucitar los siglos de Hastings ó Cortés?

¡Oh hermoso y fuerte río! La patria es un santuario;
a tutelar serpiente de ese santuario sé,
y guarda el sacro pórtico del templo solitario
de osadas violaciones de los profanos pies!

Appendix 2. ‘Rúaj Col’

Esto digo en descargo
de conciencia y de honor:
si sabio sois, lector,
pasad de largo;
si mentecato, y (¡lo que es peor!)
será el caso más probable,
pasad también de largo:
no es mi libro para vos.

Aqueste es libro tan raro,
tan fuera de uso y razón,
que vale más no lo lea
ni bestia, sabio ó doctor.

Sea el libro de cual diga
un bellaco historiador:
“libro más dichoso éste,
que jamás tuvo lector”

Más si persistís en leello,
Por temerario ó simplón,
que os lleve el señor Diablo,
ú os premie el señor Dios:
y junto con vos á mí
por intonso ó pecador,
y más único y mayor.

A, Z. López-Penha.

¹ Ángel Pulido, *Espanoles sin patria y la raza sefardí* (Granada: Editorial Facsímil, 1993), 509.

² Edna Aizenberg, ‘Sephardim and neo-Sephardim in Latin American literature,’ in *Sephardim: Spanish Jewish History and the Modern Literary Imagination*, ed. Yael Halevi-Wise (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 131.

³ Abraham Z. López-Penha, *El libro de las incoherencias* (Madrid: Librería de Victorio Pueyo, 1909).

⁴ Ilan Stavans and Iván Jaksic, *What Is la Hispanidad?: A Conversation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 2

⁵ Miguel de Unamuno, *Rosario de Sonetos Líricos* (Madrid: Imprenta española, 1911), 144.

⁶ See Guillermo Zermeño, ‘Del mestizo as mestizaje: arqueología de un concepto,’ in *El peso de la sangre: Limpios, mestizos, y nobles en el mundo hispánico*, ed. Nikolaus Böttcher, Bernd Hauseberger, and Max S. Herring Torres (México D.F: El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 2011).

⁷ Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, *Obras. Crítica Literaria* (México D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1959), 102.

⁸ República de indios y República de españoles.

⁹ See María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); and Böttcher, *El peso de la sangre*, 2011.

¹⁰ See Michal Friedman, 'Jewish History as "Historia Patria": José Amador de los Ríos and the History of the Jews of Spain,' *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol.18, n.1 (2011): 88-126.

¹¹ This theory, which becomes fundamental to the Spanish right-wing narrative of history, is developed in his monumental work *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles* (1880-1882).

¹² Gil Ben-Umeyá, Rafael Cansinos Assens, and Ernesto Giménez Caballero, among others.

¹³ See Maite Ojeda Mata, *Modern Spain and the Sephardim: Legitimising Identities* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017); Isabelle Rohr, "'Spaniards of the Jewish type: 'Philosephardism in the Service of Imperialism in Early Twentieth-century Spanish Morocco,' *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 12.1 (2011): 61-75; Michal Friedman, 'Reconquering "Sepharad": Hispanism and Proto-fascism in Giménez Caballero's Sephardist Crusade,' *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 12.1 (2011): 35-60.

¹⁴ Friedman, 'Jewish History as Historia Patria,' 118.

¹⁵ The earliest Jewish communities in America were established by Sephardim in the colonial territories that are now Brazil and Curaçao in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

¹⁶ See Rohr, 'Spaniards of the Jewish Type'; Friedman, 'Reconquering Sepharad'; Halevi Wise, 'Sephardim'; and Aizenberg, *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires* (London: Brandeis University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ Aizenberg, 'Sephardim and neo-Sephardim in Latin American literature', 2012.

¹⁸ Paula Dacarett, "'Spanish Israelite(s), Son(s) of Colombia": Ernesto Cortissoz and Abraham Z. López-Penha in Barranquilla, 1850–1950,' *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 13:2 (2014): 212-230, 223.

¹⁹ The article was used as the prologue to López-Penha's first volume of poetry, *Cromos*, published the following year in Paris by Biblioteca Azul.

²⁰ Cited in Ramón Illán Bacca, *Escribir en Barranquilla* (Barranquilla: Ediciones Uninorte, 1998), 10.

²¹ Max Henríquez Ureña, *Breve historia del modernism* (México: Fondo de cultura económica, 1954).

²² Bacca, *Escribir en Barranquilla*, 4. Interestingly, Bacca notes that 'Flor de lis', a poem written by López-Penha in 1893 and published in *Cromos*, bears an unmistakable likeness to Daríos poem 'La sonatina', published in *Prosas profanas* in 1896, and the suggestion has been made that the better-known poet 'borrowed' it from López-Penha (Bacca, 15).

²³ Paul Poplawsky, *Encyclopedia of Literary Modernism* (London: Greenwood Press, 2003), 179.

²⁴ López-Penha, *El libro de las incoherencias*, 21.

²⁵ José Enrique Rodó, *Ariel* (Madrid: Anaya, 1995). First published in 1900.

²⁶ Devi Mays, 'Transplanting cosmopolitans: The migrations of Sephardic Jews to Mexico, 1900–1934' (PhD Dissertation: Indiana University Bloomington, 2013).

²⁷ The phrase was coined by Benedict Anderson in his enormously influential study on the origins of nationalism, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

²⁸ Paloma Díaz-Mas, 'La Literatura oral sefardí: balance del pasado y perspectivas de futuro,' *Boletín de Literatura Oral* Issue 1 (July 2017): 79-104, 80.

²⁹ Dacarett, 'Spanish Israelites, Sons of Columbia,' 213.

³⁰ Judith Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1998), 8.

³¹ It is worth noting that prominent historians like Salvador de Madariaga have also made this assertion. See Madariaga, *Vida del muy magnífico señor Cristóbal Colón* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1984).

³² Robert Feldman, 'Tres épocas,' *Nosotros: Órgano Oficial de la Inión Israelita de Perú* 2 n.5 (July 1933): 2. This theory was echoed by similar publications across Latin America, as

revealed by the author's research on Latin American Jewish publications from the early twentieth century in the archives of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, June 2018.

³³ See Martínez, *Geneological Fictions*; and Antonio Feros, *Speaking of Spain: The Evolution of Race and Nation in the Hispanic World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017).

³⁴ Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews in the Caribbean* (Oxford: The Litman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 2014). As Gerber shows, one the key sources of economic prosperity of the Dutch colony in the eighteenth century had been the slave trade. Although it had been largely monopolised by the East India Company, some Sephardic merchants were also involved.

³⁵ See Lewis Gordon, 'Rarely Kosher: Studying Jews in North America,' *American Jewish History* Vol.100.1 (Jan 2016): 105-116; and Wieke Vink, *Creole Jews: Negotiating Community in Colonial Suriname* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). These are the terms used by Gordon and Vink respectively in their work on Afro-Jewish communities.

³⁶ Ladino was also spoken by the Jews of Curaçao, but its use was limited to formal contexts.

³⁷ Gordon, 'Rarely Kosher'.

³⁸ Rienk Vermij, 'On the Functions of Dedications in Early Modern Scientific Books,' *Nuncius* Vol.33.2 (2018): 171-197, 172.

³⁹ Joshua Goode, *Impurity of Blood: Defining Race in Spain, 1870-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 48. Goode shows how Hoyos' theories on ethnicity and nationhood profoundly influenced regenerationalist thinkers like José Ortega y Gasset and Joaquín Costa.

⁴⁰ Regarding the links between Pulido's campaign and Spanish fascism, see Michal Friedman, 'Reconquering "Sepharad": Hispanism and Proto-fascism in Giménez Caballero's Sephardist Crusade,' *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 12.1 (2011): 35-60.

⁴¹ Pulido, *Espanoles sin patria*, 25.

⁴² Ibid., 31. His view of the Sephardim as a racial and cultural elite contrasts starkly with his portrayal of the Ashkenazi as degenerate and as part of the lowest rungs of the societies they formed part of.

⁴³ Pulido to López-Penha, Madrid, 1 December 1905, Duke University, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library (DRRBML).

⁴⁴ Ojeda Mata, *Modern Spain and the Sephardim*.

⁴⁵ Pulido, *Espanoles sin patria*, 511-513.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 514.

⁴⁷ See Joan-Paul Rubiés, 'Were Early Modern Europeans Racist?' in *Ideas of 'Race' in the History of the Humanities*, ed. Amos Morris-Reich, and Dirk Rupnow (New York: Palgrave, 2017), 57.

⁴⁸ Henry Louis Gates Jr., introduction to 'Race,' *Writing, and Difference*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 4.

⁴⁹ Pulido asks for these 'biographical notes in his letter to López-Penha on 1 December 1905, DRRBML.

⁵⁰ Pulido, 'Espanoles sin patria,' 510.

⁵¹ André Bachoud, *Los españoles ante las campañas de Marruecos* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1988).

⁵² Susan Martín-Márquez, 'Performing Masculinity in the Moroccan Theatre of War', *European Review of History* Vol 11.2 (2010): 225-240, 236.

⁵³ Written in collaboration with the Caribbean poets Luis Carlos López and Manuel Cervera,

⁵⁴ Miguel de Unamuno, 'De nuevo la raza', in *Obras Completas, Vol IV: La raza y la lengua* (Madrid: Escelier, 1968), 649.

⁵⁵ Unamuno, 'Algunas consideraciones sobre la literatura hispano americana' (1905), in *Ensayos*, Vol. VII (Madrid: Publicaciones de la Residencia de estudiantes, Serie II Vol. 15, 1918), 135.

⁵⁶ Unamuno to López-Penha, 1912, DRRBML.