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**"María y revolución, eso es lo que ocupa mi corazón":
Love and Liberation in the Prison Writings of Ricardo Flores Magón***

A few days after the new year, 1904: Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón along with Santiago de la Hoz crossed the geopolitical border separating Mexico and the United States; their comrades Librado Rivera, Antonio Villarreal and Rosalío Bustamante joined them in Laredo, Texas shortly thereafter. United under the banner of the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) they were now, effectively, in exile. Journalists and poets; organizers and intellectuals; anarchists and agitators; but perhaps above all, dreamers: These magonistas, as they came to be known, fled persecution for their criticism of the dictator Porfirio Díaz. Now they joined with the masses of other Mexicano emigrants and took up jobs as farm laborers and dishwashers in that mighty empire to the north.¹

In November of that year the magonistas briefly reestablished their base of operations in San Antonio, resumed publication of their leftist paper *Regeneración*, and continued to agitate for democratic representation, land reform, trade unionism, and an end to Díaz' rule. Harassment forced them further north, to St. Louis, but this move was short lived. By this point the magonistas were under constant watch, from U.S.-based law enforcement as well as police and private detectives from the Pinkerton agency employed by Mexican officials. As a consequence Partido members scattered, traveling through industrial areas, rural labor camps, and mining towns in the Southwest United States and Northern Mexican frontier at a time of intense unrest and possibility; with almost a religious fervor, they believed their call for revolution was, increasingly, becoming a reality.

Yet Ricardo Flores Magón would not get to participate in the day-to-day organizing for this revolution. Instead, he spent the majority of his time during the three years leading up to the eve of the Mexican Revolution incarcerated. No stranger to a prison cell, Magón had been jailed several times while in Mexico and would be for the remainder of his life in the United States. Yet he continued to dialogue with other Partido members over political thought, philosophy, and the course of action they should take that would best advance their cause. During this time, significantly, Flores Magón clearly articulated his commitment to anarchism. "Debemos dar las tierras al pueblo en el curso de la revolución," he wrote, "de ese modo no se engañará después a los pobres."² Reforms which maintained the system or revolutions which overturned the status quo but did not address the root causes of inequality still perpetuated oppression; what was needed, Magón believed, was the abolishment of private property coupled with the redistribution of land as an important step in ending capitalism and capitalist exploitation.³ This philosophy formed the basis for the Partido's slogan of "Tierra y libertad," land and liberty, and later adapted as the rallying cry for Mexico's insurgents del sur under the direction of El Gran General Emiliano Zapata.

* "María and revolution: that is what occupies my heart" [My translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón, to María Brousse de Talavera, Los Angeles, CA, n.d. [most likely between November 22 and November 27, 1908]. In Flores Magón, Ricardo. *Correspondencia 1 (1899-1918)*. Jacinto Barrera Bassols, ed. México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la cultura y las Artes, Dirección General de Publicaciones, 2000: 495. Please note that "in a consciously political act," following Sonia Saldivar-Hull's explanation, I do not italicize Spanish words this essay, unless they are already italicized in direct quotations (*Feminism on the border: Chicana gender politics and literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000: 173). This essay is a version of a paper first presented at the 2008 NACCS annual conference in Austin, Texas.

¹ The manner in which Chicanos were treated had "a deep and lasting impression" on Flores Magón, according to an interview historian Gómez-Quiñones had with Nicolás Bernal, a Partido supporter based in Oakland, California. Gómez-Quiñones, Juan. *Sembradores: Ricardo Flores Magón y El Partido Liberal Mexicano: A Eulogy and Critique*. (Los Angeles: Aztlán Publications, University of California at Los Angeles, 1973: 23).

² "We must give the lands to the people in the course of revolution; only in this manner the poor won't be deceived" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón to Enrique Flores Magón and Práxedes G. Guerrero, 13 de junio de 1908, Cárcel del Condado, Los Ángeles, California. (*Correspondencia 1*: 464).

³ Ricardo Flores Magón to Enrique Flores Magón and Práxedes G. Guerrero, 13 de junio de 1908, Cárcel del Condado, Los Ángeles, California. *Correspondencia I*: 462-470.

There's another aspect of which Flores Magón wrote during this same time period: love. Love, that curious emotion at once universally shared and yet amongst the most intimate of all, unfolded and unfurled through words written on paper folded and furred, hidden and secret, exchanged between Flores Magón and María Brousse de Talavera (henceforth referred to as María Talavera), yet discovered and documented—as virtually every other aspect of Flores Magón's life—by authorities serving those in power in Mexico and the United States.⁴ Flores Magón, incarcerated, and María Talavera, freed—at least from the physical constraint of the prison walls—wrote one another of love and revolution, often in the same sentence, much as they must have spoken of both in the same breath. What was the nature of their love for one another and for the cause to which they dedicated their energies (and, for Flores Magón, his life)? How did this “revolutionary love” sustain them?⁵ And what can we, a century later, learn from their words and actions?

Through an analysis of their correspondence I argue that Flores Magón and Talavera practiced a praxis of love and liberation through the coupling of their desires for revolution, for freedom, and for one another. In introducing questions around intimacy, desire and sexualit(ies), I wish to draw attention to the bodily practices of embodied resistance: the (social and physical) movimiento(s) in process that I identify as embodiments of Aztlán. In *Methodology of the Oppressed* Chela Sandoval writes “it is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political ‘*movidas*’—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being” (141). She argues for the importance of understanding romantic love as a transformative, liberatory force, expressed and invoked through a “differential consciousness” that allows for the citizen-subject to actualize revolutionary love. As she explains, differential consciousness “is linked to whatever is not expressible through words. It is accessed through poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, images, sounds, words that plummet or rise through signification to find some void—some no-place—to claim their due” (140). Sandoval names this potentially decolonizing imaginary “*amor en Aztlán*” (146, her emphasis). As Laura E. Pérez explains:

To love in Aztlán is perforce to love differently, because Aztlán does not exist. ... Though to love in Aztlán is about queerness with respect to dominant orders, it is nonetheless not about sexual, ideological, cultural, political queerness reinscribing patriarchal and other hierarchies of inequality, under new guise.⁶

Her cautionary note reminds us that revolutionary love does not automatically beget decolonial love. Rather, following the suggestion of Michel Foucault (1983) and Audre Lorde (1984), we must also examine how oppositional actors can move “erotically” through power, for it is through an erotics, or what Lorde might categorize as those feelings that are “unexpress[able]” or “unrecogniz[able]” (53), that one experiences and negotiates power at the level of the body.⁷ By bringing the level of analysis to the level of the body, and of

⁴ Talavera was introduced to the PLM in 1906 by way of her involvement with the Socialist Party in Los Angeles; she began her relationship with Flores Magón a year later. Born in Zacatecas, 1867, her family emigrated to the United States at the end of the 1800s. She remained in the United States until after Flores Magón's death, at which point she emigrated to México. She died in 1947, in Ensenada, Baja California. (Barrera Bassols, Jacinto. *Correspondencia I*: 672.)

⁵ Of revolutionary love, columnist Patrisia Gonzales writes:

I believe our lives are a love story—to love ourselves, to love what we do, and to search for purpose so that we can love how we live. For those of us who have survived injustices and violence, to love is a primal, everyday act against injustice. For all revolutionary love leads back to our souls for the revolution that begins inside of us, so that we can begin to love, and change (“Column of the Americas: Amor Revolucionario (Revolutionary Love),” Universal Press Syndicate, 6 Feb. 2004. 10 May 2006. <<http://www.voznuestra.com/Americas/2004/February/6>>).

⁶ Pérez, Laura E. “Ero-Ideologies and Methodologies of the Oppressed,” unpublished paper presented at “Mapping the Decolonial Turn: Post/Trans-Continental Interventions in Philosophy, Theory, and Critique,” University of California at Berkeley, April 22, 2005.

⁷ When Sandoval recognizes that

any ‘liberation’ or social movement eventually becomes destined to repeat the oppressive authoritarianism from which it is attempting to free itself, and become trapped inside a drive for truth that ends only in producing its own brand of dominations (58)

she calls to mind Foucault's preface to Deleuze and Guatarri's *Anti-Oedipus*, where he inquires

interactions or relationships between bodies, sexed and gendered, we can begin to discuss and develop technologies and theories of decolonization at the more intimate, and therefore most directly experienced, levels.

El Partido Liberal Mexicano, Anarchism, and the Mexican Revolution

During the era of the Porfiriato, the nearly-continuous 35 year stretch of Porfirio Diaz's rule that lasted from the tail end of the 19th century through start of the 20th, the Mexican elite and foreign (mostly U.S. based) investors enjoyed a degree of prosperity in pre-Revolutionary Mexico made possible through the expansion of railroads, exhaustion of mining and agricultural resources, superexploitation of its laboring classes, and repression of its dissents, all accomplished under the name of progress.⁸ For these U.S. investors and the government which guarded their interests, Mexico served as what Ramón Grosfoguel (2003) terms a "showcase" country, one which was to demonstrate a conservative model for future Latin American economic and political development.⁹

Flores Magón's letters to Maria Talavera come at a time when he begins to shift, publicly, and with a sense of optimism, from advocating Mexican Liberalism to Anarchism. During the mid-1800s anarchist thought and philosophy developed in México in response to the industrial revolution and the exploitative conditions which accompanied it. According to Juan Gómez-Quiñones, anarchists:

...believed in abolishment of capital, of the state and of all dominating, exploitive institutions and relations. They envisioned a society of free human beings, working creatively, either individually or collectively, to produce for the common needs in free association, living according to the noblest ethics of love, harmony and peace.¹⁰

At first Flores Magón supported liberal, constitutional reforms. Yet, as he became increasingly radicalized his encouragement of populist revolt, land reform and workers rights converged in a call for total revolution against capital and the state. Whether or not Magón and the Partido Liberal Mexicana could have made their vision a reality is debatable; however, in advocating for a workforce without bosses and a world without borders the magonistas poised a serious enough threat to the both nations as to merit continuous retaliation.

After leaving Texas in 1905 and dispersing around the country the magonistas regrouped in Los Angeles in 1907 and resumed publication of their paper, now aptly named *Revolución*. Almost immediately Flores Magón was arrested, along with several of his companions. Partido supporters (including María Talavera) used the arrest and pending trial as an organizing issue while their lawyers conducted their defense of their clients in conjunction with actions both in and outside the courtroom. While held captive in Los Angeles, Flores Magón and Talavera wrote to one another several times. *Correspondencia I* reprints 19 letters Flores Magón sent to her, and four he received, between September 15, 1908 and February 28, 1909, at which point his correspondence ceased completely as a result of his relocation to Arizona. These letters, of love and revolution, were smuggled out of the prison in secret, hidden in his laundry. However, prison authorities discovered this elaborate system and closely monitored his correspondence, much as they had done and would continue to do when he wasn't behind bars. Once discovered, they photographed, documented, and reported these letters to

How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior? (1983: xiii).

For more, please see Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) and Foucault, Michel. "Preface," *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983: xiii). See also Lorde, Audre. *Sister/Outsider: Essays & Speeches*. (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984).

⁸ For a more in-depth analysis of the Porfiriato era please see Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *Triumphs and Tragedy: A History of the Mexican People*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992). For a more immediate account see also Turner, John Kenneth. *Barbarous Mexico*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969 [1911]).

⁹ Grosfoguel lists several examples of modern-day neoliberal showcases, of which Mexico is one. Escobar, as well as Gonzalez & Fernandez, however, make the point that Mexico had previously and strategically been employed as a showcase for the development of Latin America, including during the period leading up to the Mexican Revolution. Please see Grosfoguel, Ramon. *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). See also Gilbert G. Gonzalez and Raul A. Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations and Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2003) for their discussion of the role of empire in relation to development and migration in Mexico during the same period.

¹⁰ Gómez-Quiñones 4.

the U.S. and, most likely, Mexican officials.¹¹ Did Flores Magón know he was being monitored? What sort of informal networks amongst inmates were in place that enabled—and undermined—his secret correspondence? If these letters are a surviving historical record of “things said,” then, perhaps most importantly, what is left unsaid? What and where are the silences from the undocumented letters—that is, letters that escaped detection, as well as conversations had, thoughts held, dreams wished that remained secret? Certainly, Magón’s published and unpublished essays clearly express his political vision and allow us to trace his articulation of anarchist thought, as well as his shift from liberalism and socialism to the anarcho-syndicalism he advocated at the end of his life. In private, however, from his letters it appears that Flores Magón made this transformation much earlier.¹² Ironically, it is because of the state’s surveillance of Flores Magón and the Partido’s activities that we have this added insight into Flores Magón’s personal life, including the most intimate and liberating of emotions contained in his dreams of freedom and feelings of love.¹³

Flores Magón never married María Brousse de Talavera, for under anarchist philosophy marriage would imply ownership, and require official sanction from the regulating institutions of the church and the state. Rather, the two saw themselves as companions, *compañer@s*, whose love and devotion to one another (at least during this time, if we are to believe in the honesty of their letters) transcended prison walls and the oppressive mechanisms of the society that created them. Intense and powerfully poetic, Flores Magón’s correspondence shows the empathetic, sensitive, passionate side of the revolutionary poet-intellectual. This came as no surprise to those who knew him. However, his letters from this period and, especially, from his time in Leavenworth towards the end of his life also document his doubts and uncertainties, misconceptions and misgivings. In that emotional space that is love, in that geographic nowhere that is Aztlán, what possibilities and potentials did Flores Magón imagine?

The Letters

In a letter dated 15 septiembre de 1908 Talavera told Flores Magón of her concern for his well-being and her fear that he may be moved to Arizona by October. Well aware of the insurmountable challenges he faced in the court of law as well as public opinion, she wrote:

Yo no tengo fe en la Suprema [Corte]. Allí están tus enemigos. Va a suceder lo que con los jueces que los han juzgado, ¿qué han hecho?, condenaros a Arizona. ¿Qué haría yo entonces sin poderme ir luego?, me moriría de desesperación. No tengo fe más que en el pueblo. No creo en nadie más ¿quién puede cuidar de ti más que yo? Nadie si te llevan a Arizona. Yo cuidaría que no te plagiaran y como socialista agitaría al pueblo que se levante para salvarte.¹⁴

Talavera followed this letter with another, dated two days later.¹⁵ Concerned, she assured Flores Magón of her willingness to go to Arizona, should he be transferred there, and expressed her interest in organizing a Mexican branch of the Socialist Party through her contacts in both Arizona and El Paso, Texas. In his response, dated 20 septiembre de 1908, Flores Magón informed Talavera that he was very sick. This might not have been entirely unexpected as various illnesses including respiratory

¹¹ See Jacinto Barrera, “Introducción,” *Correspondencia I*: 23-53.

¹² See, for example, Ricardo Flores Magón to Enrique Flores Magón and Práxedes G. Guerrero, 13 de junio 1908 (*Correspondencia I*: 462-470). Gómez-Quíñones (1973) and Ward Albro (*Always a Rebel: Ricardo Flores Magón and the Mexican Revolution*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1992), among others, discuss this letter in greater detail.

¹³ A vociferous writer, with little else to occupy his time but his words, Flores Magón, now nearly blind and frequently ill, continued corresponding with supporters, allies, confidants, counsel, and friends while imprisoned from 1919 to 1922 in the Federal Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas. These letters were collected, translated, and reprinted in *Epistolario Revolucionario e Íntimo, Vol. I-III* (México, D.F.: Grupo Cultural Ricardo Flores Magón, 1925).

¹⁴ “I do not have faith in the Supreme Court. There lies your enemies. What will happen with that which the judges decide? What will they do? Condemn us to Arizona. What then will I do if I am unable to go? I will die of desperation. I do not have more faith than in the people. I do not believe in anyone else. Who can take care of you better than me? Nobody, if they take you to Arizona. I would see to it that nothing ails you and like a socialist I would agitate the people to rise up in order to save you” [my translation]. María Brousse de Talavera a Ricardo Flores Magón, L.A., CA, 15 septiembre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 470).

¹⁵ María Brousse de Talavera a Ricardo Flores Magón, L.A., CA, 17 septiembre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 471-2).

ailments and blindness would continue to plague him until his death. However, in addition to confronting his worsening health Flores Magón questioned Talavera, perhaps naively, as to why the Socialists don't do more to help free the imprisoned Partido members.

At the close of another letter, from September 25, 1908, Talavera optimistically predicted Flores Magón's release from prison and return to full health: "Siento que vas a salir y quiero que estés seguro. ¿Cómo estás de salud? Pronto te cuidaré para que estés bien. Yo seré tu medicina. Mutuamente nos curaremos los dos de la enfermedad que nos consume. Recibe el amor inmenso de tu María."¹⁶ Was this "amor inmenso," they shared enough to sustain him while incarcerated? On November 29, 1908, Flores Magón penned his response:

Sólo tengo fe en las dos cosas que amo: tú y la Revolución. Sí, María: fuera de ti y de la Revolución, nada hay para mí ni nada quiero. Sólo en ti y en la Revolución pienso; de las dos estoy enamorado. [499] ¿Tendrás celos de la Revolución porque la amo como a ti, dulce amada de mi corazón?¹⁷

Flores Magón's letters reveal him to be a romantic as much as a revolutionary and as such they shift, often with startling abruptness, from declarations of his love for Talavera to discussing issues related to the Partido and the campaign to free him and his companions. The longing that Flores Magón must have certainly felt comes out clearly in his letters, as does the optimism and faith to which he clung. Yet it is evident that at the edges and within the margins his doubts lingered as his correspondence with Talavera showed an increasing concern with his failing health, despite his assurances to the contrary. Did Flores Magón feel betrayed by his friends and supporters? Imprisoned, he could completely devote his thoughts to the cause of revolution, to the struggle which he advanced, and for which he was incarcerated. Outside those prison walls, however, the Partido struggled to stay afloat. The campaign for his release attracted supporters from the Mexican working class and Anglo left, as well as attention from local and national media. Yet despite this outpour of support, Magón grew increasingly indignant with those closest to him, as he made clear in a letter to Talavera, dated October 25, 1908:

Más que los tiranos, son nuestros amigos los que nos tienen en la cárcel, porque su pereza, su indolencia, su falta de iniciativa los tiene atados, nada hacen. Yo creo que nos aman y nos tienen en sus corazones; pero eso no basta para rescatarnos. Se necesita que trabajen de un modo efectivo por nuestra liberación, y eso no lo hacen.¹⁸

Continuing, Magón clarified to Talavera that he was not singling her out as she had undertaken a prominent role in working for his freedom:

[F]íjate bien y verás que son los amigos los que nos tienen presos por su apatía. Recibe mi amor inmenso y mi adoración, tú, la única mujer que hace latir mi corazón. Lo que he dicho no es un reproche para ti, ángel mío. Tú haces todo lo que puedes y con el alma te lo agradezco. Si no vences en esta lucha contra el depotismo, y no rescatas a tu Ricardo que amas y que a ti te adora, no habrá quedado por falta de empeño de tu parte.¹⁹

¹⁶ "I sense that you are going to leave and I want you to be safe. How is your health? Soon I will take care of you so that you will be well. I will be your medicine. Together we will cure one another of the sickness that consumes us. May you receive the immense love of your María" [my translation]. María Brousse de Talavera a Ricardo Flores Magón, L.A., CA, 25 [23?] septiembre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 475).

¹⁷ "I only have faith in the two things that I love: you and the revolution. Yes, María: beyond you and the revolution there is nothing for me nor nothing that I want. I think only of you and of the revolution; I am in love with both. Are you jealous of the revolution because I love it like you, sweet love of my heart?" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, LA., C.A., 29 noviembre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 498-9).

¹⁸ More than the tyrants, it is our friends who keep us in the jail, because of their laziness, their indolence, their lack of initiative that keeps them tied up. They do nothing. I believe that they love us and keep us in their hearts; but this is not enough to rescue us. One needs to work in an effective way for our liberation, and they have not done this" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, LA., C.A., 25 octubre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 483).

¹⁹ "Look closely and see that it is our friends who keep us prisoner because of their apathy. Receive my immense love and my adoration, you, the only woman who makes my heart beat. What I tell you is not a reproach for you, my angel. You do everything that you can and with my soul I thank you. If you don't succeed in this struggle

Although physically incarcerated, Flores Magón sought both a metaphorical and real release, as these letters reveal; a metaphorical and real freedom which he linked through his writing. Poetic language aside, Flores Magón remained grounded in his convictions throughout his sentence. Their correspondence shows that he placed his utmost faith in Talavera:

Mis ansias, mis sueños, mis anhelos encuentran en ti su objeto. Tú eres mis ansias, tú mis sueños, tú mis anhelos convertidos en un ser que sienta, que piensa y que ama. ... María, pedirme que no piense en mi libertad es tanto como pedirme que no piense en ti. Ya ves, amor mío, que no puedo dejar de pensar en mi libertad. Puesto que tú eres todo para mí, eres mi libertad, esto es, lo más caro que tiene un hombre de espíritu libre como yo. Privado de ti sufro, sufro cruelmente. Sólo mi pobre corazón sabe como lo tortura el dolor. [490]... Nada me consuela, nada alivia mi dolor. ... ¿Serías capaz de enamorarte de un pedazo de bronce? ¿Podrías cambiar a tu Ricardo tan sensible por un hombre de piedra?²⁰

In this letter from November 15, 1908, Flores Magón found it necessary to separate his feelings of love for Talavera with his quest for freedom. As an anarchist, Flores Magón believed in uncompromising freedom; here, he expresses the totality of his feelings of love for his partner, unfettered and unbound by society's limitations. Yet, in the same letter, he let Talavera know that just as he felt immense love he also felt immense sadness. As she became the embodiment of Flores Magón's revolutionary desires he found himself pushing up against the limitations and constrictions placed upon his person. In his writing for *Regeneración* Flores Magón stressed the humanity of the working class; in his letters he sought to reaffirm his own humanity. He was not an unfeeling man of stone, he wrote; his love for Talavera helped him to maintain his sense of self and his connection to the outside world. While Flores Magón confided his emotional vulnerabilities to Talavera and trusted her with his deepest sentiments, prison authorities were reading his letters and sharing them with his enemies—not his friends, but those in power in Mexico and the United States who saw Flores Magón as a threat to their rule. Needless to say, Flores Magón was unaware that, as he wrote to Talavera, other eyes would read his words and, undoubtedly, use them against him.

On February 28, 1909, Flores Magón wrote Talavera for what would be his last time while incarcerated in Los Angeles. Less than a week later he and the other defendants were relocated to the federal penitentiary in Arizona, where they awaited trial. This move separated Magón from his loved ones; unable to communicate with Partido supporters (outside of, presumably, his legal counsel) Magón was, in effect, silenced until his eventual release in August 1910. In that letter Flores Magón sent Talavera he reassured her of his convictions, and his commitment to both her and the cause for which he was persecuted:

Soy Viejo rebelde; no comencé a luchar ayer. [Porfirio] Díaz puede hacerme millonario en un abrir y cerrar de ojos. Pero no es riqueza lo que quiero, ni poder, ni gloria vana. Quiero que mi conciencia esté tranquila, y sólo puede estar tranquila sirviendo a los que sufren. Y si tengo la aprobación de la mujer que amo, ¿qué otra cosa puedo desear? No necesito más que tu aprobación, no quiero otra cosa sino que mi María no se avergüence de amarme. María, tus deseos son los míos.²¹

against the despot, and you don't rescue your Ricardo who loves you and who adores you, it will not be for the lack of effort on your part" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, LA., C.A., 25 octubre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 484).

²⁰ "My yearnings, my dreams, my longings encounter in you their target. You are my yearnings, my dreams, my longings converted in a being that feels, that thinks, and that loves. ... María, to ask me not to think in my freedom is like asking me to not think of you. You see, my love, that I can not stop thinking of my freedom. Saying that you are everything for me, you are my freedom, this is, the most valuable thing that a man with a free spirit like I can have. Deprived of you I suffer, I suffer cruelly. Only my poor heart knows how much the pain hurts. ... Nothing consoles me, nothing alleviates my pain. ... Are you capable of loving a piece of bronze? Could you exchange your Ricardo so sensitive for a man of stone?" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, LA., C.A., 15 noviembre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 489-90).

²¹ "I am an old rebel; I didn't begin to struggle yesterday. Díaz could make me a millionaire in the blink of an eye. But it is not wealth that I want, nor is it power or vain glory. I want a calm conscience and it can only be tranquil serving those who suffer. And if I have the approval of the woman that I love, what else could I desire? I do not need more than your approval, I don't want anything else but that my María isn't ashamed to love me. María, your

Was Flores Magón aware that this would be his ultimate communication with Talavera for the remainder of his sentence? Did he fear that it may be his final missive, should he be extradited to Mexico where he believed he awaited execution? I want to imagine his writing, valiantly, defiantly, to Talavera. This letter, as with the others, shows Flores Magón's expressions of tenderness and political engagement, revolutionary passion and romantic poetry and demonstrates what Laura Pérez terms "eros-ideologies":

[an] affirmation of an erotics of disordering desires, beginning with love of a self, once shorn of self-regard... To love thusly, is thus an act of *ofrenda*, of offering in the face of the other's negation. To love that offending, wounding other, is to dis-other Him, to her him, to me him, to *tu eres mi otro yo* him, you are my other self him²²

In the imaginary space where magonista thought and deed intersect with ero-ideologies lies a potentially decolonizing strategy, a hermeneutics of love.

María Lugones writes, "Coalition is always the horizon that rearranges both our possibilities and the conditions of those possibilities" (2003: ix). By naming his desire, Flores Magón makes it tangible, real; by sharing his desire with his object of desire he makes it collective, an act of coalition created through thought and word rather than touch and deed; by identifying himself as desired and, hence, desirable, he others himself, in an act of solidarity that (re)claims his humanity. In this letter Flores Magón echoes the present-day Zapatista motto "Mandar obedeciendo" ('to command by obeying') in his affirmation that he can only find inner peace by serving those who suffer. It is not Talavera as a passive conduit who metaphorically represents this but Talavera as an active participant in Flores Magón's dialectical desire who carries this forth.

Anarchism, Feminism and Housewives Turned Assassins

At the tail end of a letter Flores Magón wrote to Talavera dated 25 de octubre de 1908, Flores Magón included a short note addressed to Talavera's daughter Lucía Norman, who he addressed as his "adorada y dulce hijita."²³ In this postscript Flores Magón asked for Norman's assistance; because she knows English, he writes, she can encourage the American people to support their cause for, after all, "Cuando habla una mujer, se convencen los hombres, sobre todo, les da vergüenza no ser valientes."²⁴ Seen in this light it is fitting that Emma Pérez calls for women such as María Talavera and Teresa Arteaga (companion to Enrique Flores Magón) to be viewed as activists in their own rights and not just as appendages to their partners or as secondary characters in the telling of magonista history.²⁵ Clearly, the correspondence between Talavera and Flores Magón aptly demonstrate that her commitment to Ricardo, the party, and the revolution went beyond her person. At considerable risk, she smuggled letters and articles written by Flores Magón out of the Los Angeles County Jail and was involved in the planning and organizing work done by the PLM.²⁶

The *Los Angeles Times*, in identifying her as Flores Magón's lover, characterized Talavera as an "expert assassin," who plotted to kill President Theodore Roosevelt and Porfirio Díaz—as well as "a

desires are mine" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, LA., C.A., febrero 28 de 1909 (*Correspondencia*, 513).

²² Pérez, Laura, "Eros-Ideologies and Methodologies of the Oppressed," 2005. Her emphasis.

²³ Although he did not father Norman, as Nicolas T. Bernal points out Flores Magón treated Talavera's daughter as if she was his own.

Ricardo tomó muy serio la relación con Maria y hasta la últimos dias de su vida fue su compañero; siempre creyó que Maria era una persona más sensate; pero resultó un perido siempre hablaba y hablaba y no se de tenía a pensar lo que decía... ellos nunca tuvieron hijos, pero Maria, cuando se unió a Ricardo, tenía un hija de nombre Lucía a la que él siempre trató como si fuera suya, y a un hijo de ésta, lo trataba como a un verdadero nieto (Bernal, Nicolas T. *Memorias de Nicolas Bernal*. Mexico: Centro de estudios históricos del movimiento obrero mexicano, 1982: 123).

²⁴"When a woman speaks men are persuaded, above all, she shames them if they are not valiant" [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a Lucia Norman, LA., C.A., 25 octubre 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 485). As this passage suggests, the Partido Liberal Mexicano still relied upon conventional notions of masculinity and femininity even as they advocated for greater rights and responsibilities for women in the revolution (Pérez 55-74).

²⁵ Pérez, Emma. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999: 66.

²⁶ Albro 92; Pérez 66.

quiet housewife, intent on cooking *frijoles*.²⁷ For Pérez, the Chicanas and Mexicanas active in the Partido Liberal Mexicano epitomized a “dialectics of doubling” that characterized their activities as a whole and, indeed, that of the hundreds of thousands of other Mexican migrants.²⁸ In her insightful exploration of the third-space practice found via women’s participation in the Partido Liberal Mexicano Pérez argues that Mexican women created a space within the context of the Mexican Revolution to enact, if I may paraphrase, a feminism within (inter)nationalism. However, in spite of the PLM’s radicalism, Pérez rightfully observes that the male leadership:

...did not move entirely beyond their traditional views of women as nurturers. The men’s nationalism seemed to be in sync with that of the Mexican revolutionaries of Mexico; however, the PLM expressed an internationalist nationalism. The women, however, were caught between the imaginary and the real. ...The PLM women intervened interstitially, seemingly broadening the party’s platform to fit their own agenda. They pleased their male party leaders, and they engaged in revolutionary activities as they saw fit.²⁹

Conclusion: Things are Not Always What They Seem

As documented in both Flores Magón’s private correspondence and published essays in Partido papers, magonista ideology, anarchist and internationalist in nature, explicitly critiqued capitalism and the nation-state. Partido members joined thousands of other Mexicanos who emigrated to the United States and, as a part of this group, negotiated the demands and dynamics of their new environment, like their compatriots, at a time when, much like the present, “Whites came to see Mexicans as a threat to the security of the nation.”³⁰ Neither their prominence and their involvement with radical circles nor their varying knowledge of English mitigated this transition or shielded them from discrimination. Flores Magón made note of this last point in a letter addressed to Talavera dated December 6, 1909:

Y nosotros somos pobres mexicanos. Somos revolucionarios y nuestros ideales son avanzadísimos; pero somos mexicanos. Ése es nuestra falta. Nuestra piel no es blanca y no todos son capaces de comprender que también debajo de una piel oscura hay nervios, hay corazón y hay cerebro.³¹

Upset and clearly disappointed in what he felt was a lack of support, Flores Magón lashed out at the racism he felt in private and in public, much as he had done and would continue to do elsewhere.³²

²⁷Los Angeles Times, 19 September 1907, in Pérez 66.

²⁸ Pérez 59.

²⁹ Pérez 71.

³⁰ Escobar, Edward J. *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999: 69). Escobar goes on to identify the period of the Mexican Revolution as “the first time in the twentieth century that a local law-enforcement agency had developed a set of practices for controlling the Mexican American community” (76). Based on Ricardo Romo’s (1983) monograph, Escobar outlines three main elements that comprised what he labels “The Brown Scare”: whites feared revolutionary rhetoric from Mexico would radicalize U.S. Mexicans; whites also feared the violence of the Mexican Revolution would spread, or, that Mexicans in the United States might rise up in rebellion (a la “El Plan de San Diego”); and finally, following World War I, whites feared that Mexico might ally with Germany (e.g. the hysteria over the Zimmerman telegram), and used this as a pretext to call into question the loyalty of U.S. Mexicans. See also Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1983). For more on El Plan de San Diego, please see Dirk W. Raat, *Revoltosos: Mexico’s Rebels in the United States, 1903-1923* (College Station, Texas A and M University Press, 1981).

³¹“And we are poor Mexicans. We are revolutionaries and our ideas are advanced; but we are Mexicans. This is our fault. Our skin is not white and not everyone is capable of understanding nerves, heart, and brain are also under dark skin” [my translation]. Ricardo Flores Magón a María Brousse de Talavera, LA., C.A., diciembre 6 de 1908. (*Correspondencia I*: 500).

³²For example, see Ricardo Flores Magón, “La repercussion de un linchamiento,” (*Regeneración*, 12 November 1910) in which, writing of a lynching in Texas, he links capitalism with racism, and points out the poor treatment that Mexicans receive in Texas. This analysis was not limited to Flores Magón, as other Partido members experienced, and were aware of, the racism and discrimination they faced by virtue of being Mexican. See, for example, Práxedes G. Guerrero’s article that appeared a week later on the same subject (“Blancos, Blancos,” *Regeneración*, 19 November 1910).

Louis Mendoza, writing of the PLM's use of nationalism, suggests that "as an ideology, Mexican nationalism need not be Mexico-specific but, rather, a response to a transborder capitalism that simultaneously prompted migration from Mexico and forced people into a new relationship with capital in a land that was both foreign and familiar."³³ In advocating for a nationalist cause, by means of its organizing efforts (in the United States) and ideological perspective (as anarchists, or, following Gómez-Quiñones' analysis, anarcho-syndicalists) Emma Pérez posits that the Partido Liberal Mexicano:

...transcended the nationalist principles of Mexico's revolution and instead ascribed to an international workers' movement. Their rhetoric showed an allegiance to anarcho-syndicalism as a worldwide movement. One can argue that during a historical moment when Mexico was changing its bourgeois leaders, the anarchist group entertained a modernist politics, one that would united the workers of the world. One may even say that this was a harbinger of postcolonial hope for Chicano history. The PLM opened a space for a different kind of nationalism, a transnationalism that moved beyond land, beyond geographic space.³⁴

Despite the sometimes contradictory and muddled messages regarding the role and treatment of women in both the Partido and in the greater cause of revolution Pérez concludes that Chicanas and Mexicanas did actualize a third-space feminist intervention through their involvement with the PLM. This is exemplified by their legacy of radical journalism, labor agitation, and collective action, in addition to the correspondence between Talavera and Flores Magón. Furthermore, the nature of their relationship as committed partners never formally wed yet united by a shared sense of revolutionary love serves as a lived praxis in resistance to the bourgeois, or nuclear, family.³⁵

Amidst rising doubts as to the strength of the prosecution's case against them Flores Magón and the other defendants were moved to Arizona to stand trial on March 4, 1909. The trial resulted in a guilty verdict with the defendants sentenced to an additional 18 months in prison. According to Ward Albro, this effectively solidified Flores Magón's commitment to anarchism, distanced him from his base of support, weakened his influence in the Mexican Revolution, and destroyed his movement.³⁶ Yet Ricardo Flores Magón was just one individual who participated in an organized, collective movement inspired by the philosophy that still bears his name. To focus solely upon his actions, words and deeds, as if they alone directed the course of historical events that Partido members and their supporters followed, only reinscribes a linear narration of historical events that has no other outcome but failure. After all, Flores Magón died in prison, still in exile; physically separated from the land, people, woman and daughter that he loved; his vision of a world without bosses or political despots unrealized. In contrast to this sense of historical determination Robin D. G. Kelley, writing of a different context, argues that:

...the desires, hopes, and intentions of the people who fought for change cannot be easily categorized, contained, or explained. Unfortunately, too often our standards for evaluating social movements pivot around whether or not they 'succeeded' in realizing their visions rather than on the merits or power of the visions themselves. By such a measure, virtually every radical movement failed because the basic power relations they sought to change remained pretty much intact. And yet it is precisely these

³³ Mendoza, Louis Gerard. *Historia: The Literary Making of Chicana & Chicano History*. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2001: 107).

³⁴ Pérez: 60.

³⁵ As a technology of control and domination, patriarchy, male-privilege, and heteronormativity all serve to replicate structures of power embedded within and inexorably linked to race and capitalism. For example, please see Lugones, Maria. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System." *Hypatia*. Vol. 22:1, Winter 2007. (186-209.) See also Anzaldúa, 1987; Anzaldúa and Moraga, 1981; Moraga, 1983; Moraga, 1993; García, 1997.

³⁶ "As it turns out," Albro concluded, "much of the work of Ricardo Flores Magón had really been just preparation for Francisco I. Madero" to gain power (98). Elsewhere, while summarizing Flores Magón's influence on the eve of the Mexican revolution, Albro reiterates this point, writing "Mexico listened to the Flores Magón of 1906, not the Flores Magón of 1910" (116); in contrast, Cockcroft (1968) and Abad de Santillán (1925) argue that magonista philosophy formed the underpinnings of the Mexican Revolution. Please see Cockcroft, James D. *Intellectual Precursors of the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1913*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968); Abad de Santillán, Diego. *Ricardo Flores Magón: El Apóstol De La Revolución Social Mexicana*. (Mexico: Grupo Cultural Ricardo Flores Magón, 1925).

alternative visions and dreams that inspire new generations to continue to struggle for change.³⁷

If we follow Kelley's suggestions then our understanding of and relationship to Flores Magón changes as well. Rather than judging the Partido by their triumphs and failures can we not draw guidance from the merits of their hopes and aspirations? Over a century later, the ideas and ideals espoused by Flores Magón, Talavera, and other Partido members continue to inspire activists and dreamers in Greater México and beyond, and remind us that another world is possible.

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³⁷ Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imaginary*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002: ix).