The insurrectionist Ethics of Ricardo Flores Magón in *Tierra y Libertad*

Abstract

The thought of the Mexican anarchist leader Ricardo Flores Magón has been amply theorized by various Mexicans scholars who have explored his political ideas (e.g., Gómez-Quiñonez 1977, Zertuche Muñoz 2000). However, the thought of Flores Magón has not been explored so far in terms of articulating an ethical program. This is a serious shortcoming to the extent that a close reading of Flores Magón’s works reveals a deep-rooted concern with certain ethical issues and dilemmas and a sustained engagement exploring different ways to address them. For instance, in his 1916 play *Tierra y Libertad*, Flores Magón presents us with a peasant woman, Marta, who is faced with an ethical dilemma: accepting the advances of the landowner Don Julián who wishes to have sex with or letting her beloved Juan (who has been put in prison as a result of machinations of Don Julián) die in prison. Other characters engage in actions that raise central ethical questions. For instance, rather than performing his duty impartially, the jailer who holds Juan in prison attempts to make him forsake Marta by telling him that she has given herself willingly to Don Julián, since he expects that breaking Juan will bring him the favor of Don Julián as well as a promotion.

Given Flores Magón’s concern with ethical concerns and questions in *Tierra y Libertad*, the goal of my paper is to show that Flores Magón can be fruitfully interpreted as articulating an ethical program. To be more specific, I argue, on the basis of the concept of an insurrectionist ethics developed by Leonard Harris (2002) and Lee McBride (2021), that the ethical program that Flores Magón puts forth is a kind of insurrectionist ethics. I argue for this claim by showing that the main characteristics that are central to an insurrectionist ethics -in particular, (i) a willingness to defy norms when these norms perpetuate injustice, (ii) a defense of notion of personhood that motivates and justifies action against forms of injustice, (iii) a deployment of representative heuristics and (iv) a praise of traits of certain traits of character when they enable people to resist oppression- are present in the play of Flores Magón. In virtue of this, I also argue that the work of Flores Magón is valuable not only in terms of the political ideas that he presents but also in virtue of articulating an ethics of insurrection that can be used as a moral groundwork for emancipatory movements in Mexico and, perhaps more broadly, in the rest of the Americas.

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