

“‘To Fight Against Their Liberators’: Anarchism and Transnationalism in Revolutionary Baja California”

by

Benjamin Abbot

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Benjamin Abbot is in the Ph.D. program in the Department of American Studies, University of New Mexico

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## Abstract

This paper examines the historiography of the 1911 insurrection in Baja California, tracing how ongoing interpretive debates relate to the politics of historical memory. The bulk of the scholarship has focused on the question of whether the PLM betrayed Mexico by colluding with U.S. business interests in a scheme to seize Baja California for the United States. Various historians from both the United States and Mexico effectively refute this filibustering charge, but their focus on it and on the PLM’s legacy often elides specifically local dynamics at play in Baja California. The essay argues that the recent literature, notably Marco Antonio Samaniego López’s *Nacionalismo y revolución*, highlights the complexity involved and undermines any simple narrative of transnational solidarity between radicals from Mexico and the United States. To the contrary, national and racial difference loomed large among the insurrectionary forces and these tensions played a significant role the movement’s eventual disintegration.

Over a century later, the 1911 insurrection in Baja California initiated by the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) remains a site of historiographical contention despite general agreement on the basic facts. Interpretations range from exalting the Baja California campaign as the PLM’s greatest triumph and an example of anarchist internationalism, to portraying it as a chaotic movement, rife with racism and personal strife, that terrorized the peninsula’s population. Through a close reading of four key texts, this paper explores the controversy in relation to anarchist theory and practice, as well as to critical regionalism and transnationalism. I find the simultaneous tension between, and interdependence of, the local and the global crucial in conceptualizing the dynamics at play in the literature under review. I argue that the regional history of the events of 1911 demands a reconsideration of anarchist transnationalism and class-centric analysis in a world also stratified by hierarchies of nation, race, and ethnicity. Additionally, I emphasize how this debate centers on stereotypically masculine matters of

martial valor and public recognition. The corpus on the 1911 rebellion demonstrates the personal and community stakes involved in knowledge production.

To set the scene, I offer a brief and necessarily reductive sketch of the events of 1911 that begins with the PLM. Founded in 1905 by a group of Mexicans in exile in the United States—that most notably included Ricardo Flores Magón—the PLM emerged from the Partido Liberal and the struggle against the dictatorial government of Porfirio Díaz. The periodical *Regeneración*, with many thousands of subscribers at its height, constituted the core of the party's efforts for social transformation in Mexico and across the world. The famous 1906 PLM platform articulated a vision of republican government and social responsibility within the Mexican liberal tradition exemplified by Benito Juárez. However, Flores Magón and others in the party likely already held anarchist sympathies if not convictions. After a few years of mobilization and supporting various uprisings across Mexico, the PLM organizing junta prepared an armed expedition to Baja California in the hopes of making the sparsely populated and poorly defended state a base for revolutionary action throughout the country. At this time, Mexico was witnessing the inception of Francisco I. Madero's military movement against Díaz in the north, and waxing local rebellions across the country.<sup>1</sup>

PLM-affiliated forces crossed the border and took the town of Mexicali in late January of 1911. Though Mexicans—including Mexican Americans and Mexican Indians such as the Mayo and Cocopah peoples—initially made up the bulk of the insurgents, Anglo-Americans and European nationals soon joined in abundance, to the point of eventually outnumbering their Mexican counterparts. Members of these armed bands clashed over personal, political, and ethnic differences but continued to battle against Mexican government forces and captured cities in Baja California, including Los Algodones, El Álamo, Tecate, and Tijuana. Madero's

ascendance in May, following his victory at Ciudad Juárez and Díaz's exodus, heightened divisions among insurgents in Baja California. Concurrently, the spectacular if short-lived antics of Richard "Dick" Ferris, rebel commander Carl Ap Rhys Pryce, and others at the Tijuana camp gave further credence to simmering notions that insurgents were part of the established filibustering tradition and so sought to annex Baja California to the United States. Baja Californians, including refugees from insurgent-occupied towns, organized to resist what they saw as a filibustering invasion. After negotiations between Madero and the PLM junta broke down, Madero sent the federal army against the rebels who refused to agree to his peace terms. The army overwhelmed the beleaguered and divided insurgents, thus terminating large-scale PLM military activities in the region.

In the aftermath, the PLM lost much of the influence it once held across Mexico, significantly because of the perception of the filibustering and collusion with U.S. business interests to seize Baja California. Despite this loss and repeated legal troubles, the party remained a vibrant part of the global anarchist movement and local Los Angeles radical community until government repression climaxed in 1918 with a twenty-year prison sentence for Ricardo Flores Magón. He died incarcerated at Fort Leavenworth under suspicious circumstances four years later. His 1923 funeral procession to Mexico attracted massive public attention and even unwanted Mexican government support. Using the narrative of Flores Magón and the PLM as precursor to the Mexican Revolution proper, the Mexican state manages to claim as its own—always incompletely—this anarchist who hated all governments. Against and sometimes as part of the state-sponsored nationalist story, Flores Magón lives posthumously as inspiration and symbol for the overlapping Chicana/o, Mexican radical, and worldwide anarchist communities.<sup>2</sup>

The historiographical controversy surrounding the 1911 insurrection has to date focused on the charge of filibustering leveled at Flores Magón. A minor body of regional literature revolves around the 1920 book *¿Se apoderará Estados Unidos de América de Baja California?*, in which Rómulo Velasco Ceballos concludes that Flores Magón collaborated with U.S. capitalists in a gambit to conquer the peninsula. This line of inquiry often asks the curious question of whether a man who passionately denounced nationalism was a patriot or traitor. So went the war of words in the 1950s and 1960s between Pablo L. Martínez and Enrique Aldrete, both born in and deeply tied to Baja California. Martínez and Aldrete each endeavored to win via overwhelming display of period evidence in the form of reproduced documents.

Representing the extreme of animus for Flores Magón, Aldrete expressed outrage at the growing popularity—including in state schools—of the thesis that Flores Magón led a socialist revolution rather than a filibustering attack in 1911. The repetition of “INVASION FILIBUSTERA MAGONISTA ANARQUISTA” in *Baja California heroica* illustrates Aldrete’s sensationalism and unmitigated contempt for anarchism, which he described as opposed to order of any kind and thus to socialism. Aldrete presented Flores Magón’s ideology as consistent with a filibustering conspiracy to annex Baja California, opportunism, and the wanton destruction he portrayed PLM-affiliated forces as causing. Martínez countered by invoking historical truth and unbiased investigation, but his writings nevertheless display marked distaste for porfirismo and porfiristas alongside abiding sympathy for Flores Magón’s egalitarian ideals.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to Flores Magón’s place in Mexican history, and by extension the status of his supporters, this regional literature involves the prestige or shame of Baja Californians who opposed the insurgents and by extension their decedents. The narrative of filibustering portrays these Baja Californians as unambiguous heroes; the narrative of the PLM campaign as a socialist

revolution portrays them as dupes of dictator Díaz. Much scholarship, especially by authors with some distance from Baja California, makes roughly the latter case. Lowell L. Blaisdell's 1962 *The Desert Revolution*, for example, defends the valor of Flores Magón, the PLM, and the radical union the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), whose members participated in numbers in the armed contingent. Note how the martial logic of gaining esteem through fighting the good fight permeates the discourse on all sides. Alongside and connected with its political importance, writing history distributes pride and embarrassment in the historian's present and future.<sup>4</sup>

The historiography of anarchism reveals related investments in commanding respect. A compelling recent instance of this, the 2010 collection *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940*, edited by Steven Hirsch and Lucien Van der Walt, argues for the importance and relevance of anarchism and syndicalism in anti-imperialist struggles, as well as presenting anarchism as an outstanding example of transnational dynamics. Hirsch and Van insist that it "is a vital history that has often been ignored, or dismissed, in many texts." While anarchism, particularly in the United States and Europe, has received significant scholarly interest, it lags far behind Marxism and socialism in this regard. Hirsch and Van der Walt, in accord with other analysts since the collapse of the Soviet Union, suggest that anarchism's time has come again, citing "a remarkable resurgence of anarchist and syndicalist ideology, organisation, and methods of struggle." They tie their academic knowledge production explicitly to contemporary anarchist and anarchist-inspired political mobilization, recommending the study of "classical anarchism and syndicalism," because these movements "bequeathed a legacy of struggles for holistic human emancipation and dignity." Apropos the 1911 insurrection and questions of interpretation involved, Hirsch and Van der Walt declare that "the history of

anarchism and syndicalism must be a global one,” with any given manifestation examined in light of the larger international context. As a synthesis, they describe anarchism as part of the fight “against imperialism, national oppression and racial domination” and as “an interconnected subaltern resistance movement that spanned the continents in a struggle to remake the world.”<sup>5</sup>

Hirsch and Van der Walt’s call for studying anarchism with attention to the big picture and emphasis on ties that cross borders underscores their connection to transnational studies, which has been popularized in humanities disciplines over the last two decades. Hirsch and Van der Walt, as well as various authors included in *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940*, explicitly describe anarchist movements as “transnational” in addition to being “international.” For Hirsch and Van der Walt, transnationalism, when studying anarchist movements, means focusing “not only on national and local contexts but on supranational connections and multidirectional flows of the ideas, people, finances, and organizational structures that gave rise to these movements.”<sup>6</sup>

The transnational turn has its discontents, notably José E. Limón, whose discerning criticism provides insight about the conflicts in the historiography of the 1911 insurrection in Baja California. Through critiques of José David Saldívar and Ramón Saldívar, Limón contends that excessive focus on finding high-level patterns constitute an intellectual trap that prevents comprehension of regional difference. The following line regarding José Saldívar and his book *Border Matters* encapsulates Limón critique: “Once again, in encompassing so much and in his abiding concern with ‘resistance,’ [Saldívar] hurriedly misreads and sometimes overlooks the specificities of the local sites and texts, and the varying complexity of their interaction with the global.” Limón’s critical regionalism, drawn from Kenneth Frampton and Cheryl Temple Herr, requires careful and nuanced analysis of the local, the global, and their mutual interaction. Limón

in particular, lauds Herr's method as containing "an abiding and fulsome respect for and rendering of the complexity of local cultures in comparison to others in the world, while recognizing that all are in constant but critical interaction with the global." I write informed by, and appreciative of, both transnationalism and critical regionalism, but I consider Limón's criticism of the two Saldívars especially pertinent here. The local-global tension, alongside and as part of political agendas and status claims, defines the historiographical controversy about the events of 1911 in Baja California.<sup>7</sup>

I begin exploring these issues in detail by looking at Mitchell Cowen Verter's portrayal of the Baja California campaign in *Dreams of Freedom* (2005), a translated collection of Ricardo Flores Magón's writings. Verter, one of the editors, provides an eighty-one-page "Biographical Sketch" that summarizes the history of Flores Magón and the PLM. As the most substantial English-language reader of Flores Magón's work, *Dreams of Freedom* has presumably introduced the Mexican anarchist's ideas to many who don't read Spanish; I've often recommended it myself, and shared my copy on occasion. The volume unambiguously targets anarchists and sympathizers, situating Flores Magón and PLM in their historical transnational radical community and as inspiration for twenty-first-century radicals. Like Hirsch and Van der Walt, albeit with unrestrained political commitment and religious aesthetics, Verter recommends anarchist history as worthwhile in the contemporary moment. "We further hope," he writes at the end of the biographical sketch, "that our translations of the poetic words of the great anarchist prophet Ricardo Flores Magón will inspire the English-speaking world to continue his struggle for the liberation of humanity."<sup>8</sup>

Verter notably introduces the 1911 insurrection as one of the PLM's few victories: "Amidst its long history of failures, the PLM achieved one major success in the Mexican

Revolution. It inaugurated a significant military campaign in the Mexican state of Baja California.” The Baja California campaign thus functions as proof of the PLM’s relevance in the historiography of the Mexican Revolution as a whole, and constitutes a crowning achievement for the party. After explaining how the PLM organizing junta selected Baja California because of geographical proximity to Los Angeles and weak defenses, Verter assesses the recruitment of non-Mexican allies as indicative of Flores Magón’s wisdom: “Ricardo Flores Magón demonstrated his understanding of the international struggle against exploitation by inviting non-Mexican fighters to join in the Baja campaign. Lacking sufficient Mexican troops, especially ones with much military experience, the PLM turned to U.S. radicals for help.” Highlighting the international character of anarchism in the early twentieth century, Verter mentions that “several Italian and Spanish anarchists came to fight for Mexican liberation.” In sharp contrast with narratives of filibustering and treason, for Verter the presence of foreigners in Baja California reflects positively on the PLM leadership.<sup>9</sup>

So why then the backlash? Verter explains as follows: “Unable to tolerate the international thrust of Flores Magón’s mission, various individuals used nationalistic arguments to discredit the struggle. U.S. And [*sic*] Mexican officials and newspapers spread the rumor that the motley crew of fighters was composed of mere ‘filibusters’ (foreign mercenaries), fighting in Mexico to seize territory for the U.S.” This narrative of a libelous plot against Flores Magón and the PLM—whether by U.S. and Mexican officials, the press, or both—amounts to an established scholarly tradition, which I address at greater length further on. In Verter, the notion of self-serving government deception leads to a straightforward if derogatory appraisal of those who armed themselves against the PLM-affiliated forces: “Using such propaganda, the Mexican Counsel in Los Angeles organized reactionary Mexicans to fight against PLM supporters.” At

the end of the next paragraph, he uses even stronger language: “Impelled by the propaganda of the Mexican government and suspicious of the odd assortment of individuals in the PLM army, some of Baja’s local population began to fight against their liberators in June 1911.” The last clause—“some of Baja’s local population began to fight against their liberators”—conveys with masterful intensity and brevity the thesis that the false consciousness of nationalism drove Mexicans who according their class position should have embraced the PLM to instead defend the Díaz government.<sup>10</sup>

The insurgent force, on the other hand, was a group of committed revolutionaries sullied by the actions of a tiny minority: “Although Flores Magón definitely did not want to seize Baja for Yankee capitalists or for the U.S. government, his struggle was embarrassed by the few who did. The Baja campaign attracted combatants with a variety of motives. Radicals who wanted to bring justice to the Mexican people or to foment worldwide anarchist revolution composed the vast majority of the PLM army. However, the struggle also attracted a few opportunists whose desires were not so noble.” As I show below, the question of the rebel forces’ composition appears throughout the historiography; Verter’s interpretation is more generous than most.<sup>11</sup>

In sum, Verter describes the Baja California campaign as a heroic attempt by Flores Magón to create social revolution in Mexico that attracted brave idealists regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or race as well as a handful of troublemakers. The rebellion, by this account, ultimately fell to Madero’s federal troops because the U.S. and Mexican governments—including Madero—invoked nationalism to trick Baja Californians into fighting against their liberators. “More insidiously,” Verter writes, “Madero published and distributed a manifesto listing him as president and Flores Magón as vice-president. Many PLM members were fooled and enlisted as his soldiers.” Finally, many leftists—unionists, socialists, classical liberals, and

so on—betrayed and abandon the PLM because they were “too reformist to dare to dream the anarchist vision of Ricardo Flores Magón.” Calumny, deception, and treachery stand out as the causes of anarchist failure.<sup>12</sup>

The Baja Californian regional scholarship of Marco Antonio Samaniego López develops a decidedly different discourse on the events of 1911. In his 2008 monograph *Nacionalismo y revolución*, Samaniego López makes numerous interventions into the historiography that contradict, confuse, and complicate the story Verter tells. I interpret these interventions as a challenge to the PLM-centric narrative reminiscent of Limón’s critique of the two Saldívars. While Samaniego López doesn’t engage with *Dreams of Freedom* and Verter doesn’t cite any of Samaniego López’s earlier work, I find reading these two authors side by side underscores the tensions between local and global simmering in the scholarship on the 1911 insurrection in Baja California.

Samaniego López starts his book with the assertion that all the oldest residents of the state agree that the Flores Magón brothers attempted to annex Baja California to the United States. Acknowledging the inconsistency of anarchists conspiring with the U.S. government and concurring with near historical consensus that PLM organizing junta had no annexation plans, Samaniego López asks why older Baja Californians hold steadfastly to the idea of filibustering. As a striking conceptual shift compared with other scholarship, Samaniego López argues that “it is not possible to refer to the armed movement in Baja California as ‘magonista,’” and that the “leadership of the Flores Magón brothers over the men in arms was not real.” In this fashion, Samaniego López moves away the question of Ricardo Flores Magón’s complicity or innocence, which he considers resolved in favor the latter, in order to reconsider the matter of filibustering.<sup>13</sup>

Pushing aside Flores Magón and the associated baggage of his place in the historiography of the Mexican Revolution, Samaniego López centers instead the history of filibustering in Baja California specifically. This context, typically muted if not absent in other treatments of the events of 1911, facilitates Samaniego López's historical revision. He compellingly argues that filibustering amounted to a credible threat in the period because of a confluence of factors that ranged from the avowed interest in annexation from certain sectors of the Imperial Valley to the marshaling of U.S. troops at the border and the involvement uniformed army deserters with the rebel forces.<sup>14</sup>

In an intervention that undermines celebration of the transnational nature of the PLM-affiliated forces, Samaniego López writes that “nationality and skin color were core elements” in the “intense conflicts between the members of the movement.” He indicates that the racial prejudice practiced by some or many of the Anglo-American participants furthered the perception that the movement was about conquering land for the United States. And even the IWW, commonly cited as the exception to white-supremacist union organizing in the period, is implicated: “The famous writer Jack London, who sympathized with the armed movement in Baja California and delivered a talk in Los Angeles in its favor, also claimed that he was a socialist, but before being socialist, he was white. This racial idea was shared by members of the IWW and in little time the theme of skin color became an obstacle to the formation of a genuine group.” This takes us far from Verter's account of cross-border worker unity against capitalism.<sup>15</sup>

“As we will see,” Samaniego López continues, “in key moments of dispute, from the view of the participants, the racial question surpassed the interests of whatever ideology, be it socialist, anarchist, or of the [classical] liberal type.” His extensive and meticulously researched

narrative indeed contains repeated examples of racial conflict. Amid accounts of gun duels, arguments, separation, and segregation, Miguel Bravo's testimony stands out. Samaniego López describes Bravo as a young PLM member who had personal experience with the organizing junta. However, going to the armed camp left him disillusioned and prompted a defection to maderismo: "I saw, in place of love and brotherhood, hatred, egotism, envy, personal quarrels." Another PLM defector told Bravo "that his separation came because it was not possible for him to continue supporting those people, almost in their entirety Americans that didn't obey any order and committed abuses, depredations, in a frenzied manner." Samaniego López writes that "Bravo claimed that it was about men without conscience, without feelings of honesty or altruism, they were adventurers, tramps, soldiers of fortune."<sup>16</sup>

About the composition of the rebel force in late February, Samaniego López writes that it was "a third part Mexican, another part more or less equal of IWW members and the remaining part soldiers of fortune, adventurers, U.S. army deserters, ex-combatants of the war in the Philippines and Cuba, as well as veterans of the Boer Wars in South Africa." Especially when combined with Bravo's words, this contradicts Verter's assessment that committed revolutionaries made up the vast majority of the PLM-affiliated army.<sup>17</sup>

As another critical scholarly intervention and historical revision, Samaniego López rejects the notion that the characterization of the armed contingent as filibusters existed solely or primarily to defame the PLM. He argues that even many Mexican government claims of filibustering appeared out of concern that Baja California would go the way of Texas rather than a cynical attempt to discredit Flores Magón. In Samaniego's narrative, speculation about filibustering started in late February after insurgent leader and Socialist Party member Simón Berthold announced the intent to create a socialist republic. Alongside the context of filibustering

mentioned above, Berthold's statement incited speculation that he was planning to seize land for the United States. After all, Texas's separation from Mexico began with the state succession as a nominally independent republic. While Samaniego acknowledges specific propaganda efforts against the PLM by the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles, he argues that the pro-Díaz papers that used the term "filibustero" initially employed it generically against foreigners who took part on the revolutionary side and made no distinction between Flores Magón and Madero in this regard.<sup>18</sup>

The signs of filibustering accumulated and intensified as month passed. For Mexican refugees in the United States in the first days of June, during which Richard Ferris and company briefly and ineffectually declared Baja California a new republic with its own flag—burned by Mexican and Indigenous members of the armed contingent—Samaniego writes the following: "It was about a filibustering movement, in their moment. And it was not any trick, a tall tale from Vega, or a historical falsehood invented by Rómulo Velasco Ceballos in 1919. For the refugees, it was a reality emerging from the events themselves." This constitutes a powerful articulation of one of the main theses in *Nacionalismo y revolución*: Baja Californians acted reasonably in interpreting the armed contingent as a filibustering expedition and organizing to resist the invasion militarily. "The idea of a filibustering movement was not gratuitous," Samaniego López writes, "and much less that, as we show, a group of Mexican residents in San Diego, and therefore without having anything to do with Díaz's government, volunteered in order to defend the national territory from an invasion that, for all the elements that came into play, seemed to have as its end the separation of the peninsula."<sup>19</sup>

Samaniego López directly engages the historiography by criticizing the way various historians have dismissed Ferris as a clown, a humorous if embarrassing interlude in the drama

of the 1911 PLM campaign. “Simplifying the events to being about a comic opera planned by Dick Ferris to gain publicity,” Samaniego writes, “is to limit understanding of the process.” To the contrary, he argues that we should take as authentic rather than farcical the speech insurgent captain Louis James made June 3 declaring the new republic in honor of the blood spilled by white men. Though newly elected insurgent leader Jack Mosby released a statement against Ferris that same day and the new republic came to naught, Samaniego presents the proposal as having considerable support from the Anglo-Americans involved. In place of Verter’s clear lines between true revolutionaries and unprincipled opportunists, Samaniego López’s narrative suggests a heterogeneous force that contained many Anglo-Americans apparently sympathetic both to the PLM’s internationalist class struggle and to white supremacy. Samaniego López’s mention of how Mosby himself offered the presidency of the hypothetical new republic to a U.S. rancher mere weeks before becoming a PLM loyalist underscores the contradictions and shifting political alignments at play.<sup>20</sup>

While opposing the discourse of conspiracy against Flores Magón, as noted above, Samaniego López grants that the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles under Arturo M. Elías wielded intentionally falsified propaganda against the PLM. Elías own words make this incontestable, as he described how Guillermo Prieto Yeme—an employee of the consulate—penned a fictional letter under a pseudonym that emulated the “humble, incoherent, faulty and aggressive style” he and Elías attributed to the Mexican worker. This letter, addressed directly to Ricardo Flores Magón, accused him of treasonously advancing a filibustering campaign that would end in territorial losses like those of 1848. It additionally stresses Anglo racism against Mexicans. Mexican government officials and anti-filibuster leagues produced and distributed

thousands of copies of the letter, which apparently served its purpose well, inspiring patriotic fury against Flores Magón and the PLM.<sup>21</sup>

Samaniego López appropriately analyzes the document as indicative of the depth of sentiment racial discrimination aroused in the Mexican population, particularly those residing in the United States; Elías and company appealed to Mexican workers' routine experience with white supremacy. "Unfortunately for Flores Magón and in spite of the internationalism that has subsequently been argued to defend his figure with respect to the events in Baja California," Samaniego López writes, "the problem of cultural differences was acting against him from the interior of the armed group." *Nacionalismo y revolución* overall attests to this. However, Samaniego López refrains from exploring in depth the deceptive letter's implications in relation to the discourse of conspiracy against Flores Magón. Here we have firm evidence for a stereotypical case of officials at once manipulating the masses and expressing utter contempt for them; one could hardly imagine clearer confirmation of Flores Magón's radical understanding of the Mexican government as an institution of class domination in favor the elite and nationalism as their self-serving ruse. A single case doesn't make the rule, but it does invite contemplation about what else was in fact a plot against Flores Magón and the PLM.<sup>22</sup>

In relation to anarchism, consistent with Alan Knight's synthesis of the Mexican Revolution, Samaniego López portrays radical ideology as relatively unimportant. Rather than exploring the details of the world the PLM wanted to create, as various other historians do, Samaniego López emphasizes Madero's influence while keeping the attention always squarely on Baja California. *Nacionalismo y revolución* shows how the PLM's internationalist anticapitalism insufficiently attended to local specificities. Most tellingly, Samaniego López starts the final chapter by quoting a letter Ricardo Flores Magón wrote to Tirso de la Toba, a

Baja Californian who was trying to reignite the revolution in late June of 1911. In this letter, Flores Magón advises de la Toba to head to southern Baja California in order to find “rich towns” (pueblos ricos) from which to obtain provisions. From there, Flores Magón thought, the movement could attract Indigenous support by promising land redistribution and expropriating the necessities of life from the rich. Samaniego López writes that de la Toba ignored this counsel because his regional knowledge told him that rich towns didn’t exist in the southern part of the peninsula and that the Indigenous peoples in the area weren’t joining the movement in significant numbers.<sup>23</sup>

As illustrated above, Samaniego López picture paints a dramatically different picture from Verter. In it white supremacy, disorganization, and personal grudges overshadow egalitarian internationalist ideals. The notion that Baja Californians fought against their liberators seems patronizing and reductive in the historical regional circumstances that *Nacionalismo y revolución* articulates.

I now turn to Ethel Duffy Turner’s *Revolution in Baja California* in order to explore the genealogy that underlies Verter’s heroic interpretation of the 1911 PLM campaign. Verter draws heavily on Turner’s longer work concerning the PLM for the biographical sketch in *Dreams of Freedom*. Turner, who edited the English-language section of *Regeneración* into April of 1911, had personal experience with the PLM junta during the period in question and remained deeply sympathetic to Flores Magón even after his anarchism caused her and other U.S. socialists to step away from the party. Turner’s narrative resembles Verter’s yet at the same time contains elements that hint toward Samaniego López’s less sanguine take.

*Revolution in Baja California* comes to us thanks to the efforts of Rey Devis, who unearthed a copy of the manuscript after Turner’s death. Devis published this “stranger-than-

fiction tale of intrigue, conflict, and heartbreak” involving the “action-filled life” of the “freedom hero” Ricardo Flores Magón in order to inspire “Chicano kids” in Los Angeles. While Devis makes no mention of anarchism, he displays a similar level of admiration for Flores Magón as Verter. Turner herself barely lived into the age of the Chicano movement, but *Revolution in Baja California* lauds Flores Magón as a principled visionary who struggled for everyone to live “the good life.” Turner composed the manuscript to defend Flores Magón against the charge of filibustering and to bolster his place as a Mexican national hero; she described the “phony but effective filibuster issue” as “spearheaded by the *Los Angeles Times*.” The desire for status and respect thus again operates as a core motive for knowledge production. Whether a matter of Chicana/o cultural nationalism, Mexican nationalism, big-tent socialism, or anarchism, so much of the historiography on Flores Magón involves presenting him as an inspirational figure. Turner concluded *Revolution in Baja California* with the following sentence: “Ricardo Flores Magón lives on, inspiring from his Rotonda tomb all who believe that liberty and the good life for every being is neither luxury nor pipe dream.”<sup>24</sup>

Though she noted in passing the racism of Louis James’s June proclamation in Tijuana, prejudice against Mexicans constitutes a minor theme of Turner’s work at best. She, like Verter after her, considered the majority of the PLM force as moved by high ideals. However, her description contains some of complexity and confusion emphasized by Samaniego López: “Among the true adherents to the Liberal cause were found followers of many ideologies—Socialism, Anarchism, independent free-thinking, Constitutional Republicanism. In the minds of many was confusion as to the ultimate aims of the Partido Liberal, even though Ricardo Flores Magón was constantly emphasizing these aims.” While the PLM was always doing the right thing in Turner’s assessment, according to her some within the PLM-affiliated force still didn’t

grasp the party's revolutionary ideals: "At this time *Regeneración*'s circulation was 25,000 a week, but numbers of recruits in Baja California either did not read the paper or did not digest its contents. This was particularly true of the Anglo-Americans. The *comisión de gobierno* did its best to indoctrinate volunteers and to weed out crackpots and the suspect, but perfection is unattainable in such a fluid, fast-breaking situation." Turner's comment about Anglo-Americans resonates obliquely with the white supremacy and colonial mentality Samaniego López details.<sup>25</sup>

About the situation after Francisco Madero's victory at Juárez, Chihuahua, Turner wrote: "Opportunists and traitors within the Liberal camp tried subtly to disaffect some men over these issues, but the majority remained loyal to the Partido Liberal." Samaniego López's narrative of conflict within the Tijuana camp and endless defections to maderismo conflicts with Turner's claim here. Likewise, Turner stressed the upright conduct of PLM troops following the capture of El Álamo: "But their fighting spirit was strong, and they took no advantage of the inhabitants, who were treated considerately, per the Junta's standing order that no looting or mistreatment of non-combatants was to be tolerated." Samaniego López, by contrast, focuses on the suffering of Baja Californians in occupied areas, some of whom – and not just the rich – lost possessions or even their lives to the armed contingent. Many fled across the border to the United States. Read beside Samaniego López, Turner's citation of the PLM organizing junta's directives highlights the tension between how Flores Magón and company wanted the campaign to go and what happened on the ground Baja California. This constitutes in an example of the broader tension between the global and the local.<sup>26</sup>

As the fourth text under close scrutiny, Lawrence Douglas Taylor Hansen's 1992 *La campaña magonista de 1911 en Baja California* constitutes a source for both Verter and Samaniego López. Employing the aesthetics of scholarly distance and the pursuit of historical

truth, Taylor Hansen typifies the academic side of the school of thought that situates the events of 1911 within their international context first and foremost. Taylor Hansen devotes a chapter to PLM allies in the United States and multiple chapters to the shifting ideology of the PLM. He analyzes the participation of non-Mexicans in Baja California with the same in Madero's forces elsewhere on Mexico's northern frontier, assessing in the former as unique only numerically. His final chapter covers what he describes as "a propaganda campaign from the Porfirian government to brand the Liberals as 'filibusters.'" *La campaña magonista de 1911 en Baja California* is one of the many texts in this historiographical tradition that Samaniego López makes a point of contesting.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, Taylor Hansen includes the failures and contradictions of the PLM's internationalist ideology. Regarding the composition of the armed force, he writes the following: "As will be seen ahead, the 'Wobblies' would come to constitute only a third of the total number of foreigners who fought in Baja California, the principal theater of combat of the Liberal military campaign of 1910 to 1911. The other two thirds would be made up of soldiers of fortune, army veterans, cowboys, students, vagabonds, etc." Of these two thirds, he writes that "a good proportion of these men were without doubt attracted by the opportunity to earn money and acquire lands in Mexico." However, although he presents this heterogeneous force as falling short of the PLM's goal of universal workers' revolution without regard for national borders, Taylor does not engage with the theme of Anglo discrimination against Mexicans. To the contrary, he portrays the IWW as one of the few U.S. labor organizations of that period to include members regardless of their "color or sex" and that, unlike the Socialist Party, was not segregated by race. Tellingly, Taylor Hansen spends two paragraphs on Jack London's friendship with John Kenneth Turner and support for revolutionary action in Mexico without

discussing London's pronounced white supremacy and later call for U.S. military occupation of Mexico.<sup>28</sup>

As many academic authors treating anticapitalist movements in general and anarchism specifically, Taylor Hansen suggests that the PLM's sympathizers "wanted to reach more immediate goals, like improvements in wages and working conditions, more than a radical transformation of society and the distribution of wealth." He criticizes the lack of organization and leadership in the PLM, though without making the claim—as Samaniego López does—that the PLM junta had no meaningful control over troops in the field. In sum, *La campaña magonista de 1911 en Baja California* is centrally concerned with the filibustering question in relation to Flores Magón's reputation and explains his internationalist anarchist ideology in order to show why so many non-Mexicans participated in the Baja California campaign.<sup>29</sup>

Taylor Hansen's piece in the 2011 edited collection *Baja California a cien años de la Revolución Mexicana* indicates that his views have shifted but not changed dramatically since writing *La campaña magonista de 1911 en Baja California*. In his chapter, Taylor consistently focuses on the matter of filibustering and the importance of global context. He does note, citing *Nacionalismo y revolución*, that the filibuster thesis did not originate with Rómulo Velasco Ceballos but emerged years earlier; Taylor also pays somewhat more mind to the history of filibustering in Baja California. On the other hand, the notion of a conspiracy to defame the PLM remains key. After a curious section arguing that most every faction during the revolution technically included filibusters according U.S. law, Taylor begins his conclusion as follows:

The magonista revolt in Baja California had the misfortune of happening in a region where the collective memory of the filibustering expeditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had left a profound impact on the consciousness of the inhabitants. Additionally, even though magonismo represented the culmination of a rebel movement that had originated in Mexico and that included the most radical aspirations of the political plans proposed by the different groups that participated in the armed struggle 1910-1920, it also found itself

inserted, in a somewhat ironic manner, within the general context of U.S. expansionism that was found in its stage of full development at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>30</sup>

Here, regional specificity combines with internationalist radical ideology to produce strange and tragic results. While recognizing the genuine threat of annexation, Taylor Hansen frames Mexican suspicion of the PLM army as basically a matter of misunderstanding; the history of filibustering made a revolution look like an annexation attempt. Taylor Hansen's penultimate paragraph contains a strong endorsement of transnational analysis: "Limiting the discussion of the events of 1911 in Baja California to the national determining factors to the exclusion of consideration of the significance of the international in which it was located, is to deny a reality, as well as to restrict the possibility of reaching a deeper and more correct understanding on the subject." On a simplistic but useful local-global continuum, Samaniego López leans toward the local whereas Taylor Hansen favors the global in a manner that echoes the two opposed grand synthesis of the Mexican Revolution: Alan Knight's *The Mexican Revolution* and John Mason Hart's *Revolutionary Mexico*. Neither Samaniego López nor Taylor Hansen employs critical regionalism as such; I am not convinced that any of the historiography meets José Limón's ideal of interweaving the local with the global. As Taylor Hansen writes, "it's probable that the study of the campaign in Baja California will continue arousing interest among professional historians and writers in general for many years in the future."<sup>31</sup>

Despite the fact that Taylor Hansen and Samaniego López reference the same source documents and same basic narrative of events, their interpretations stand far from one another conceptually and affectively. The latter author's focus on Anglo racism against Mexicans and authentic annexationist sympathies among the armed contingent as well as the plight of Baja Californian residents and refugees produces a divergent understanding of the events of 1911.

While Taylor Hansen's internationalist reading is approximately compatible with the celebratory accounts from Verter and Turner, *Nacionalismo y revolución* prompts piercing questions about what contradictions involved mean for anarchist theory and practice. As a white-privileged anarchist acquainted with racism and colonialism within the present-day anarchist community, I find the conflicts between Anglos and Mexicans in the Baja California campaign uncannily familiar. I worry that glorifying the Anglo-American members of the PLM-affiliated armed contingent without acknowledging how pervasively white supremacy circulated among them furthers white supremacy here in the twenty-first century. The sanguine narrative simultaneously constitutes a missed opportunity to interrogate the complexities of working-class white masculinity in the early twentieth century. That Anglos—IWW members included—in Baja California could go for explicitly white-supremacist schemes one day and back to global class war the next speaks volumes about their conflicting interests and sympathies in the period. I write this historiographical review in part to invite further analysis of the PLM Baja California campaign that attends in depth to questions of race, white supremacy, and nationalism in relation to the global anarchist movement. Samaniego López's corpus suggests the need to qualify and complicate the meaning of anarchist transnationalism. I like to think the classical anarchist period gives us both a wealth of examples to emulate and terrifying traps to avoid.

In relation to the status stakes at play in this historical controversy, Samaniego López's careful attempt to recuperate the honor of the Mexicans who organized to defend the national territory from U.S. invasion and to remember the suffering of those driven from their homes lead to high-level questions about agency in history as well as about the place of the region in national and international history. Presumably because it unsettles the celebratory narrative, few other accounts of the events of 1911 dwell on how the PLM-affiliated army caused harm to the

civilian population. The patriotic volunteers appear strictly as dupes of the elite in this discourse, a stance Samaniego López firmly rejects, as refuted by, and infeasible because of the presence of family members of the volunteers in Baja California. In this way Baja California appears as a sort of historiographical sacrifice, with these local interests in respect ignored with the ends of creating a more inspiring and coherent story about the PLM and the revolutionary prophet Ricardo Flores Magón. I remain optimistic that we can produce knowledge that avoids this diminution of local in the favor of the global and that exhibits a wide-ranging if not completely indiscriminate empathy for the historical actors and contemporary interests involved. For Baja California in 1911, Samaniego López's scholarship takes us in that direction.

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell Cowen Verter, "Biographical Sketch," in Chaz Bufe and Michael Cowen Verter, eds., *Dreams of Freedom: A Ricardo Flores Magón Reader* (Oakland, California: AK Press, 2011), 33-43.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamín Maldonado Alvarado, "Introduction," *Dreams of Freedom*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Enrique Aldrete, *Baja California heroica: episodios de la Invasión Filibustera-Magonista de 1911* (México: Frumentum, 1958), 20-21, 448. 452-453; Pablo L. Martínez, "Sobre el libro Baja California heroica. Contra la defensa de una falsedad histórica," in Aidé Grijalva, Max Calvillo, and Leticia Landín, editors, *Pablo L. Martínez: Sergas californianas* (Tijuana: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2006) 269.

<sup>4</sup> Lowell L. Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution: Baja California, 1911* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Hirsch and Lucien Van der Walt, in Steven Hirsch and Lucien van der Walt, editors, *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution* (Brill, 2010), xxxii; 395, 410.

<sup>6</sup> Hirsch and Van der Walt, *Anarchism and Syndicalism*, xxxii, 410.

<sup>7</sup> José Eduardo Limón, "Border Literary Histories, Globalization, and Critical Regionalism," *American Literary History* 20: 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008), 164, 167-168.

<sup>8</sup> Verter, "Biographical Sketch," 102.

<sup>9</sup> Verter, "Biographical Sketch," 77, 78.

<sup>10</sup> Verter, "Biographical Sketch," 78.

<sup>11</sup> Verter, "Biographical Sketch," 78.

<sup>12</sup> Verter, "Biographical Sketch," 80, 82.

<sup>13</sup> "No posible denominar al movimiento armado en Baja California como 'magonista'" and "El liderazgo de los hermanos Flores Magón sobre los hombres en armas no fue real." Marco Antonio Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y revolución: los acontecimientos de 1911 en Baja California* (Tijuana: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2008), 8, 9. I know of no historical work published within the last few decades that claims Flores Magón had filibustering designs.

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<sup>14</sup> On filibustering in this period, see Rachel St John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> “Los intensos conflictos entre los integrantes del movimiento, en el que la nacionalidad y el color de piel fueron elementos torales”; “El famoso escritor Jack London, quien simpatizó con el movimiento armado en Baja California y proclamó un discurso en Los Angeles en su favor, también aseguró que era socialista, pero primero que ser socialista, era blanco. Esta idea racial era compartida por miembros de la IWW y en poco tiempo el tema del color de la piel se convirtió en un obstáculo para la conformación de un verdadero grupo.” Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y revolución*, 10, 11, 362.

<sup>16</sup> “Como veremos, en momentos claves de la contienda, desde la visión de los participantes, la cuestión racial sobrepasó los intereses de cualquier ideología, ya fuera la socialista, anarquista, o la de tipo liberal, no en el sentido del PLM, sino a la referente a la Constitución de 1857, que como vimos, hubo quienes estaban en la lucha porque se respetara la forma de sociedad que allí se planteaba” and “Bravo aseguró que se trataba de hombres sin conciencia, sin sentimientos de honradez ni altruismo, eran aventureros, *tramps* [sic], soldados de fortuna.” Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y revolución*, 362, 381-382; “vi, en vez del amor y la fraternidad, el odio, el egoísmo, la envidia, las rencillas personales” and “que su separación obedeció a que no le fue posible soportar más a aquella gente, casi en su totalidad americanos que no obedecían ninguna orden y que cometían abusos, depredaciones, de una manera desenfrenada,” Miguel Bravo, *Diario del Hogar*, August 1, 1911.

<sup>17</sup> “una tercera parte de mexicanos, otra más o menos igual de miembros de la IWW y la parte restante de soldados de fortuna, aventureros, desertores del ejército estadounidense, excombatientes de la guerra de Filipinas y Cuba, así como veteranos de la guerra de los boers en Sudáfrica” Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y revolución*, 362.

<sup>18</sup> Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y revolución*, 236, 238-295.

<sup>19</sup> “Se trató de un movimiento filibustero para ellos, en su momento. Y no fue ningún engaño, una patraña de Vega, o una falsedad histórica inventada por Rómulo Velasco Ceballos en 1919. Para los refugiados, fue una realidad surgida de los propios acontecimientos.” Then: “La concepción de movimiento filibustero no era gratuita y tampoco que, como señalamos, un grupo de mexicanos residentes en San Diego, y por tanto sin tener nada que ver con el gobierno de Díaz, se prestara para defender el territorio nacional de una invasión que, por todos los elementos que entraron en juego, parecía tener como fin la separación de la península.” Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y revolución*, 527, 544. Celso Vega was the military and political head of Baja California in 1911.

<sup>20</sup> “Simplificar los acontecimientos a que todo se trató de una ópera bufa planeada por Dick Ferris para obtener publicidad es limitar el entendimiento del proceso.” Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y revolución*, 515.

<sup>21</sup> “estilo humilde, incoherente, defectuoso y agresivo” Arturo M. Elias, Telegram to Secretary of Foreign Relations in Mexico City, May 24, 1911, in Grijalva, Calvillo, and Landín, *Pablo L. Martínez*, 199; Samaniego López, 533-536.

<sup>22</sup> “Por desgracia para Flores Magón y a pesar del internacionalismo que se ha argumentado para defender posteriormente su figura respect de los sucesos en Baja California, el problema por diferencias culturales estaba actuando en su contra desde el interior del grupo armado.” Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y revolución*, 535.

<sup>23</sup> Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y revolución*, 576, 601-602.

<sup>24</sup> Rey Devis, Editor’s Forward, in Ethel Duffy Turner, *Revolution in Baja California: Ricardo Flores Magón’s High Noon* (Detroit: Blaine Ethridge Books, 1981), iii; Turner, *Revolution in Baja California*, 35, 86.

<sup>25</sup> Turner, *Revolution in Baja California*, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Turner, *Revolution in Baja California*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> “una campaña propagandística del gobierno pofirista para tachar a los liberales como ‘filibusteros’” Lawrence Douglas Taylor Hansen, *La campaña magonista de 1911 en Baja California: El apogeo de la lucha revolucionaria del Partido Liberal Mexicano* (Tijuana: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 1992), 84.

<sup>28</sup> “Como se verá más adelante, los ‘wobblies’ llegarían a constituir únicamente un tercio del número total de los extranjeros que lucharon en Baja California, el teatro de combate principal de campaña militar liberal de 1910 a 1911. Los otros dos tercios se formarían de soldados de fortuna, veteranos del ejército, vaqueros, estudiantes, vagabundos, etc.” “una buena proporción de estos hombres fueron sin duda atraídos por la oportunidad de ganar dinero y adquirir tierras en México” Taylor Hansen, *La campaña magonista*, 34, 42, 56, 80-82.

<sup>29</sup> “querían alcanzar metas más inmediatas, como mejoras en los sueldos y condiciones laborales, más que una transformación radical de la sociedad y la distribución de la riqueza” Taylor Hansen, *La campaña magonista*, 80, 124.

<sup>30</sup> “La revuelta magonista en Baja California tuvo el infortunio de ocurrir en una region en donde la memoria colectiva de las expediciones filibusteras del siglo XIX había dejado un profundo impacto sobre la conciencia de sus habitantes. Asimismo, si bien el magonismo representaba la culminación de un movimiento rebelde que se había

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originado en México y que abarcaba las aspiraciones más radical de los planes políticos propuestos por los distintos grupos que participaron en la lucha armada de 1910-1920, también se encontró insertado, de manera algo irónica, dentro del contexto general del expansionismo estadounidense que se encontraba en su etapa de pleno desarrollo a finales del siglo XIX y las primeras décadas del XX.” Taylor Hansen, *La campaña magonista*, 48-49.

<sup>31</sup> “Limitar la discusión de una consideración del significado del contexto internacional en que se ubicaban, es negar una realidad, así como coartar la posibilidad de llegar a una comprensión más profunda y acertada al respecto.” “es probable que el estudio de la campaña en Baja California continuará despertando interés entre los historiadores profesionales y escritores en general durante muchos años en el futuro” Taylor Hansen, *La campaña magonista*, 49.