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by

Michael Benjamin Amoruso

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**A Transcendental Mission: Spiritism and the Revolutionary Politics of
Francisco I. Madero, 1900 – 1911**

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor: _____
Thomas A. Tweed

Virginia Garrard-Burnett

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Michael Benjamin Amoruso, B.A., M.A.

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Michael Benjamin Amoruso, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

SUPERVISOR: Thomas A. Tweed

This study argues that Francisco I. Madero, a Spiritist and the thirty-third President of Mexico, understood his political action as the earthly component of spiritual struggle. In Madero's correspondence, "spirit writings," and pseudonymous Spiritist publications, we find a prescriptive Spiritist vision, in which democracy represents a triumph of human's "higher nature" over the "base, selfish passions" of Porfirio Díaz and his regime. This prescriptive vision is both characteristic of Kardecist Spiritism, the transnational metaphysical movement influential in the Americas since the mid-nineteenth century, and the outward expression of an inner struggle, in which self-discipline, charity, and hard work are thought to calm one's "animal passions," and in so doing attract "higher spirits" that aid in spiritual development. While reserved in the public presentation of his religiosity, the documentary evidence suggests that for Madero, the democratic struggle had "transcendental" significance. Analyzing his published work alongside his personal and political biography in the period between 1900-1911, this study briefly considers this prescriptive Spiritist vision and the ways it inflected Madero's political action and accommodated changing political circumstance.

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In October 1907, Francisco I. Madero declined the nomination for the President of the Central Board of the National Spiritist Congress of Mexico. In a letter to the Board's chair, Madero explained his competing commitments. "I talked to you some of the adventures of the last election we had in this state, about three years ago. Well... I have to devote my energies to the next campaign quite soon." Over the past year, Madero had grown increasingly uneasy with Mexico's Díaz regime, which he saw as repressive and inimical to the spread of Spiritism. His letter continued, "I believe that this is the best way to use my strength for the benefit of my fellow man, and *I will fight on this earth for the same cause that you defend in another way*" (EPI 192-3/October 29, 1907; emphasis added). The next day, Madero channeled a spirit, José, who told him, "you must fight tirelessly for the cause of good, the triumph of truth, and the regeneration and progress of humanity" (CE 177/October 30, 1907).^{1 2}

Later that year, with José's spiritual guidance, Madero began writing *The Presidential Succession of 1910* (1908). This book, which advocated the democratic election of a vice president to succeed the autocratic Porfirio Díaz, was a popular success that earned Madero the title of "apostle of democracy" and catapulted him onto Mexico's political stage. In 1909, he began mounting an anti-reelection campaign, and through his book and speaking tours became a figurehead of the democratic reform movements across the country. By the next year, Madero's anti-reelection campaign became a full-

¹ I would like to thank Professor Matthew Butler for his help and encouragement on the first iteration of this study. His guidance and expertise were invaluable during my early forays into Madero's presidency and the Mexican Revolution.

² Citations in this format are reserved for certain dated primary sources (and thus exclude Madero's *Presidential Succession of 1910*, *Spiritist Manual*, and *Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita*). See *Abbreviations*, page 38.

throated electoral challenge, and Madero ran for President of Mexico. When Díaz had him jailed in June 1910 on trumped up charges of aiding a fugitive, Madero escaped prison, fled for Texas, and issued the Plan of San Louis Potosí, a call for armed revolution that ignited the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Madero reentered Mexico in February 1911 and consolidated his position as the leader of the revolution, demanding that rebel troops recognize him as commander and provisional president. By April, Madero had amassed substantial support in the northern states. After losing battles to emerging rebel movements in the south and the fall of Ciudad Juárez in May 1911, Porfirio Díaz resigned and left for exile in Europe. In October of that year, Mexico held its first free and fair presidential elections in over thirty-five years. Francisco I. Madero won in a landslide, and on November 6, 1911, was sworn in as the thirty-third President of Mexico.

Canonical histories of Madero and the Mexican revolution, such as Stanley Ross's authoritative biography, *Francisco I. Madero: Apostle of Democracy* (1955) and Alan Knight's *Mexican Revolution* (1990), have long suggested that Madero's Spiritism was essential to his political engagement, but have neglected to examine it at length. In this work, I take Madero's Spiritism seriously and argue he understood his political engagement as the earthly manifestation of spiritual struggle. In Madero's correspondence, "spirit writings," and pseudonymous Spiritist publications, we find a prescriptive Spiritist vision, in which democracy represents a triumph of man's "higher nature" over the "base, selfish passions" of Díaz and the Porfiriato (see, e.g., *CE*

163/April 17, 1907; Madero 2011, K585, K1444).³ This prescriptive vision is both characteristic within institutional forms of the transnational metaphysical movement known as Kardecist Spiritism and the outward expression of an inner struggle, in which self-discipline, charity, and hard work are thought to calm one's "animal passions," and in so doing attract "higher spirits" that aid in spiritual development. While reserved in the public presentation of his religiosity, the documentary evidence suggests that, for Madero, the democratic struggle had "transcendental" significance (see, e.g., Madero 1990, 198, 240; *CE* 229/July 26, 1908; *AP* 22/May 17, 1909; *AP* 30/June 13, 1909).

While a growing body of scholarship has come to address how Madero enacted his Spiritist vision in policy (see especially Tortolero Cervantes 2000a, 2000b, Guerra de Luna 2000, Schraeder 2009, Mayo 2011), in this work, I focus primarily on how Spiritism came to bear on two moments in his life: his decision to enter the political arena and his turn toward revolutionary violence. While Madero's policy positions both before and during his brief tenure as president were compatible with Spiritism, they were also "classically liberal" in the vein of Benito Juárez. This fact, along with a paucity of documentary evidence regarding Madero's Spiritism during his presidency, precludes the possibility of a strong causal argument about Spiritism's direct historical influence on Madero's policy decisions. On the other hand, I find that the richness of Madero's religious and political writings, correspondence, and spirit communications in the period leading up to his unlikely decision to challenge Porfirio Díaz and engage in revolutionary

³ "K*" citations refer to Amazon Kindle locations.

violence lends to a more robust analysis of the ways Spiritism inflected Madero's political action.

In tracking the continuities and shifts in the relationship between Madero's Spiritism and politics over time, I rely heavily on Madero's dated, published work. Madero was a prolific writer, and in addition to *The Presidential Succession of 1910*, Madero authored a wealth of political speeches, manifestos, and articles, in addition to over a decade of outgoing correspondence. Madero also wrote extensively on Spiritism, including two books, the *Spiritist Manual* (1911) and *Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita* (1912), articles published in the Spiritist periodicals *La Cruz Astral*, *Helios*, and *El Siglo Espírita*,⁴ and reprints of speeches delivered at Mexico's National Spiritist Congresses in 1906 and 1908. Most important for this study, I reference over four years of Madero's "automatic writings," in which he channeled spirits who offered doctrinal, practical, and political guidance through his pen. His spirit writings are particularly important to this analysis, in that they illuminate the fundamentals of his Spiritist worldview and, following a dramatic shift in 1907, its relevance to his politics.

Social Justice in the Séance Circle

Though Madero's political impact was exceptional, his commitment to democracy and social reform was common among Mexican Spiritists, who participated in a

⁴ Madero's articles in *Helios* and *El Siglo Espírita*, at least as published in his *Complete Works*, are a serialized *Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita* and the proceedings of the First and Second National Spiritist Congresses, respectively. Though I have not been able to obtain copies of these journals, neither Tortolero Cervantes (2000a) nor other scholars have cited any other of Madero's articles in these journals.

transnational discussion about religion and reform.⁵ Both Spiritism and Spiritualism, its Anglo American forebear, were imbricated in progressive politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the early history of the latter set the tone for both movements. “Spiritualism” refers to a loose constellation of practices centered on communicating with the dead that emerged in Victorian America and Britain following the early, highly publicized séances of Kate and Margaret Fox in 1848. The Fox sisters’ earliest followers were local Quakers, particularly a handful of Friends on its “radical edge” interested in freedom of expression (Albanese 2007, 180).⁶ Through this connection, American séance Spiritualism became attached to a Quaker philosophy of “inner light, inner truth, and outer action to reform society according to the spirit principles of grand connection” (181). In the next decades, Spiritualism’s reformist tendencies were magnified by the influence of Andrew Jackson Davis, whose “harmonial” philosophy called on humankind to work toward “eternal progress” and mental and spiritual perfection, which, once “properly accomplished,” would elevate the “social world” (Albanese 266, 260).

⁵ While most studies of Spiritism in Mexico or France have focused on the national context, Schraeder (2009) briefly discusses the movements “transnational identity” and “affiliations [that] reinforced progressive aspects” of Spiritism, which were established through the French occupation of Mexico from 1862-1867 (21-28). Most studies give a perfunctory nod to Spiritism’s international presence, but little more. Some scholars, however, have gestured towards transnational Spiritism and Spiritualism or offered multi-sited studies. See, e.g., Bridget Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-century American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*, New Cultural Studies Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Cristina Rocha, “A Globalização Do Espiritismo: Fluxos Do Movimento Religioso de João de Deus Entre a Austrália e o Brasil,” *Revista de Antropologia* 52, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 571–603; and Reinaldo Roman, *Governing Spirits: Religion, Miracles, and Spectacles in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1898-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

⁶ As Albanese (2007) notes, Quakers had flirted with spirit communication prior to the sisters’ séances, and Kate and Margaret Fox’s spirit demonstrations appealed to their belief in “an unbroken chain of communication” between “the Infinite and all beings” (181).

More concretely, early U.S. Spiritualism was an early vehicle for the spread of women's rights, and was important in the temperance and abolition movements. The weak hierarchy of the séance circle along with cultural prejudice that associated spirit mediumship with femininity (and, to some extent, blackness) rendered Spiritualism a space in which women could gain prominence as mediums and touring "trance speakers" (Albanese 234-6; Braude 2001). According to Braude, spirit mediums "formed the first large group of American women to speak in public or to exercise religious leadership," and their lectures provided "appreciative audience for advocates of women's rights" (Braude xi-xx). Imbued with Quaker abolitionist tendencies from the start, prominent abolitionists and African Americans, too, participated in early Spiritualism. While we should resist painting too rosy a picture—as Alex Owen (1990) notes in her study of British Spiritualism, the authority that the séance circle offered women (and, by extension, blacks) was limited, in that it relied on a construction of women as "natural" mediums and thus weak or sensitive—Spiritualist séances, institutions, and publications offered a relatively progressive social vision and the discursive space for exploration of religious ideas of political consequence.

Nineteenth-century French Spiritism grew out of and shared in Spiritualisms reformist tendencies. Because the term "Spiritism" is often deployed with considerable imprecision, I offer a limited clarification: For the purposes of this study, "Spiritism" refers to "Kardecism" or "Kardecist Spiritism," a relatively distinct subset of Spiritualism based on the teachings of Allan Kardec (Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail). While Kardec coined the French term *spiritisme* to distinguish "Spiritualism" from "spirituality" in

general, many of his followers and Anglo Spiritualists soon came to see it as distinct.⁷ The term signals an adherence to the “Spiritist Codification,” Kardec’s five books that expound the spirits’ doctrine, and a concomitant belief in reincarnation. Reincarnation was long in vogue among French social reformers, and Spiritism’s claim to empirically demonstrate its veracity attracted followers among a broad audience, including the liberal intelligentsia (Sharp 2006, 50-1). Unlike British and American Spiritualism, both of which were diffuse and decentralized, Kardec enforced orthodoxy through his “Codification” and *Le Revue Spirite*, the movement’s main periodical that reported (and thus legitimized) new doctrinal developments and linked Spiritist centers throughout France (73-81).

Like U.S. Spiritualism, French Spiritism gained a following across France’s socioeconomic spectrum. Its emphasis on “progress, the importance of work, education, equality, fraternity, and individual responsibility” and positivistic inquiry of the spirit world appealed especially to bourgeois liberals (Sharp 2006, 54, 65). While Kardec’s “Codification” is thin on political commentary and even militates against it—his *Mediums’ Book* reprints the bylaws of his Parisian Spiritist circle, which expressly forbade discussion of “politics, religious controversy, and questions of social economy”—Sharp suggests “Spiritism’s calls for equality and solidarity meant calls for

⁷ Anglo Spiritualists publishing in major periodicals of the day consistently made a distinction between Spiritism and Spiritualism, often referring to the former with ambivalence or disdain (see, e.g., *The Spiritual Magazine*, January 1866, 28). Today, most people who self-identify as “Spiritism”—at least in the United States and Brazil—are Kardecist Spiritists.

social change” (100).⁸ French Spiritist leaders “waged a strong republican, anti-clerical campaign, calling for equality and social reform” in the 1860s and 1870s, and educational reforms in the 1880s (100). As with Braude, Sharp likewise suggests—perhaps too generously—that the muted significance of gender and rank hierarchy within the séance circle fostered a sense of democracy (93). We should take unbridled optimism with skepticism, however. Kardec’s doctrines left ample room for classism, in that his evolutionary model of souls implied that some, living or dead, were less perfect.⁹

Mexican Kardecist Spiritualism shared its French progenitor’s emphasis on progress and equality, as well as its appeal among the bourgeoisie elite. Within the past decade, scholars have increasingly followed the lead of Jean-Pierre Bastian (1989, 2007) in identifying Spiritism’s importance as a social space for dissent, particularly during the Porfiriato (see, e.g., Devés Valdés and Melgar Bao 1999, Tortolero Cervantes 2000a, Rugeley 2001, Arzú 2002). While partially that is true, scholars have tended to neglect Spiritism’s theological content and elide it with Protestantism and Freemasonry, both of which act as stand-ins for “modernity” in contrast to the “traditionalism” of the Catholic

⁸ Note, however that Kardec’s emphasis on individual responsibility stands at odds what Sharp identifies as French Spiritists’ interest in socialism. In *Heaven and Hell*, Kardec derides socialists as “those who feel the notion of duty and conscience to be troublesome” and ridicules the “hollowness of their doctrines” (2003, 89).

⁹ According to Kardec, “It is easy to distinguish between advanced and less advanced spirits. The language of higher spirits is dignified, high-minded, and free from every trace of human passion... On the other hand, remarks by less advanced spirits make use of commonplace, sometimes coarse, language and often contain substantial inconsistencies” (13). Because intent is important for Kardec—good people with good intentions attract elevated spirits—I would be surprised if certain wealthy Spiritists did not find the coarse language of spirits that visited lower class devotees as confirmation of their inferiority.

Church.¹⁰ Likewise, as Schraeder (2009) argues, Mexican Spiritists “generally supported a moderate politics, consistent with the Porfirian agenda” of order and progress (134).

Spiritism arrived in Mexico sometime before 1868, after the 1857 publication of Kardec’s *Spirits’ Book* and the disestablishment of the Catholic Church in 1857 (Schraeder 2009, 2).¹¹ While séance spiritualism and other “spiritualist” practices and movements diffused throughout the country, General Refugio I. Gonzales championed a French Kardecist orthodoxy that made inroads among the literate, urban middle class, and intelligentsia. Gonzales translated Kardec’s works into Spanish and helped found the Central Mexican Society of Spiritists in 1872, which had branches in six major Mexican cities (Brewster and Brewster 2007, 95). These urban Spiritist circles were exclusive, and in requiring literacy immediately excluded 82 percent of the population. They proliferated among the urban elite, and Spiritists established at least thirty formal circles, or Spiritist societies, by 1893 (Schraeder 3, 21).¹² Though Spiritist circles were commonly named for uncontroversial national heroes like Manuel Hidalgo and Benito

¹⁰ For example, following the bold assertion that “any serious discussion of dissident nineteenth-century religious ideologies begins with spiritualism,” Rugeley (2001) asserts that “spiritualism is best seen as the maverick cousin” or even “a form of” Protestantism (198). Rugeley’s essentializing an ill-defined “spiritualism” and “Protestantism” allows him to create a continuum from tradition and backwardness (i.e., the Catholic Church and other unenlightened religiosities) to a more rational, liberal, and modern Protestantism. Though this general model is not as pronounced in other scholars’ work, both Tortolero (2000) and Bastian (2007) elide Protestantism, Spiritism, and modernity and thus inevitably and inaccurately portray all Spiritists, including Madero, as anticlerical and anti-Catholic.

¹¹ *La Ilustración Espirita* claims that the Mexican Spiritist movement started in 1857, but historians have not found evidence to substantiate this claim. It seems likely, however, that France’s occupation of Mexico between 1862-1867 contributed to Spiritism’s spread, if not its introduction in Mexico (see Schraeder 2009, 21).

¹² Schraeder (2009) notes that Spiritists estimated 70,000-100,000 formal and informal participants in 1876 (3).

Juárez, nineteenth-century Mexican Spiritists did not participate in any struggles *en masse* and most subscribed to a general and safe nationalism (138-139).¹³

Francisco I. Madero, Spiritism, and the Democratic Club of San Pedro: 1900 – 1906

Francisco I. Madero was heir to both French and Mexican Spiritism. His father, a wealthy, urban businessman, dabbled with Spiritism, but it was not until the young Madero's studied in France between 1887-1892 that he embraced Kardecist doctrine. In his memoirs, Madero recalled his 1881 encounter with *La Revue Spirite*, the premier Spiritist periodical, as "the most transcendent of my life" (MM 29). Dissuaded by the "somber and irrational" Jesuit Catholicism of his primary schooling, Madero claimed to have had "no religious belief, nor philosophical creed" before Spiritism (29). Madero wrote that he "devoured" Kardec's published work, which he found "so rational, so beautiful, and so new" (29). Though Madero later reflected that his early engagement with Spiritism was somewhat superficial, having prompted no major lifestyle changes, it was formative. Madero was exposed to occult and Eastern religious ideas, which had become popular among French Spiritists in the doctrinal loosening that followed Kardec's death. He was particularly struck by the *Bhagavad Gita*, to which he later devoted decades of study and called. The text's philosophy of action deeply influenced Madero, and seems to have both girded his political action and provided a moral justification for his 1910 revolt against Porfirio Díaz.

¹³ Schraeder (2009) suggests that Alberto Santa Fe, an advisor to turned critic of Díaz who led an uprising in Puebla, was "inspired by socialist and Spiritist ideas" (138). She does not, however, indicate whether Santa Fe was affiliated with Kardecist circles or the nature of his religious practice.

Madero returned to Mexico in 1893, but did not begin practicing Spiritism in earnest until 1900, when he helped organize the Center for Psychological Studies of San Pedro.¹⁴ The center was a venue for séances and mesmeric healing, and its members sought to document and prove the presence of spirits through electrical and photographic experiments (Tortolero Cervantes 2000b, 13). It was at this time that Madero discovered his proficiency as a writing medium. “Automatic writing” was a preferred technique of Spiritists, in which a medium incorporated a spirit that communicated messages through the medium’s hand. By 1901, he regularly practiced automatic writing in both public and private.

Madero’s early spirit writings came mostly from his deceased brother, Raúl, and consisted in general instruction on Spiritist doctrine and practice. As early as 1901, Raúl suggested writing a book on Spiritism that would be comprehensible to Madero’s countrymen, which Madero later carried out with his 1911 publication of *The Spiritist Manual*. Raúl also offered detailed guidance about Spiritist meetings, instructing Madero to ban members who missed more than two sessions in a month (CE 42/May 23, 1901). The spirits offered guidance on homeopathy and magnetic healing, both of which Madero practiced and researched (Tortolero Cervantes 2000a, 90).¹⁵ Madero took broad interest

¹⁴ Madero left France in 1891 to spend a year studying agriculture in Berkeley, California. Enrique Krauze (1997) claims that while there, Madero came into contact with the Theosophy of Annie Besant (247). Unfortunately, Krauze does not elaborate upon Madero’s encounter with Theosophy at any length. While Madero’s library holdings and correspondence indicate a continued interest in Theosophy (see, e.g., *EPI* 198/December 7, 1907), he does not seem to have considered himself a Theosophist proper. As far as I have been able to determine via correspondence with the Theosophical Society’s archivist in the United States, Madero does not seem to have been on any official membership roles (personal correspondence, May 17, 2012).

¹⁵ Tortolero Cervantes (2000a) also notes that Madero kept extensive records of research and experimentation, which are housed in his personal archives at the *Archivo Francisco I. Madero de la*

in alternative religions: his 1902-4 book orders show requests for titles on Spiritualism, Spiritism, magnetism, as well as works that appropriated some traditions of ancient Egypt, Phoenicia, and Greece (see, e.g., *EPI* 41/March 4, 1902, *EPI* 59/December 2, 1902, *EPI* 75/April 7, 1904). In this sense, Madero's transnational eclecticism was typical of Mexican and French Spiritists of his time, who had newfound freedom to engage Eastern and "occult" religious ideas following Kardec's death in 1869.

While Madero's early spirit communications did not address matters of government or state, they nonetheless suggest the outlines of a prescriptive social vision. Madero often conducted automatic writing in group séances, and in these communications Raúl regularly communicated the importance of Spiritist evangelizing, which he framed in terms of a "struggle" or "battle" (see, e.g., *CE* 119; April 11, 1903). He likewise assured the Coahuila Spiritists that their sublime doctrine had the potential "to elevate humanity far above its current level" (*CE* 57/November 4, 1901). Raúl castigated superficial engagement with Spiritism, mocking those who simply "admired our communications" but made no effort to "break with all the shameful vice and shake off ignominy and the heavy yoke of matter" (*CE* 64/November 4, 1901). He urged the circle to "completely dominate matter, to the extent of making your body an instrument of your spirit" (*CE* 131/September 15, 1903) and to "develop your will" by "dominating all your actions" and avoiding "pride and vanity" (*CE* 133/October 10, 1903). "The

Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 1901, contenedor 8, caja 13, folios 14054-141882 (90). While she suggests they might be useful to historians interested in works on homeopathy and alternative medicine, I suspect one might also find further elaboration of Madero's model of the body, which would be relevant to how he understood the "sickness" of the nation.

will,” he insisted, is a force powerful enough “to save nations, and even humanity” (*CE* 133/October 10, 1903).

The spirits’ emphasis on overcoming matter tracks closely to the model of spiritual reality outlined in Kardec’s “Spiritist Codification.” For Kardec, “the spirit-world is the normal, original, eternal world... [and] the physical world is secondary” (1996, 32). Kardec did not reject the world, however, but rather saw it as a venue for the perfection of the human spirit through reincarnation (81). In Kardec’s doctrine, commitment to work, charity, family, and the progress of society both indicate and cultivate one’s own spiritual perfection, as well as aid the progress of others. “Bad passions” or “animal appetites” such as “pride, selfishness, and sensuality... bring us back toward the animal nature, by attaching us to matter” (34, 36).

This spectrum from passion to perfection is essential to Madero’s Spiritist worldview. Progress and transcendence operate on the basis of “sympathy,” a mutual attraction between human, spiritual and celestial bodies (cf. Cox 2003). In this Spiritist model, as well as the Spiritualist model before it, good and well-intentioned people attract good spirits, and bad people attract bad spirits. In Madero’s circle, Raúl decried superficial Spiritists, whose presence impeded the arrival of elevated spirits (*CE* 64/November 4, 1901). But, more broadly, this sympathetic model had implications for personal and political practice. About a decade after these first communications, Madero explicitly elaborated upon this sympathetic relationship in his *Spiritist Manual* (2011): “the man who is sober, temperate, generous to his fellows and of pure heart, is most likely to receive inspiration from higher spirits” (K585). At the societal level, the

Spiritist worldview valued freedom, health, charity, and progress because these conditions attracted higher spirits that aided individual development and collective well being.

In these early communications, then, we find a religious framework that, though yet unrealized in political action, seems to have inflected—or at least been compatible with—Madero's attitudes towards business and social relationships. Like many Spiritists, Madero was not averse to wealth—Spiritist doctrine does not fault wealth, whether inherited or earned—and, following the path trod by his wealthy family, amassed a personal fortune through agriculture and property investment. Madero was committed to ensuring the well being of his tenants, and to this end provided workers with hygienic housing, medical care, and elementary schools. He made substantial charitable contributions to local hospitals, established a local dining room for poorer residents of San Pedro, and provided scholarships for local students. And soon after taking up automatic writing, a family crisis prompted Madero's commitment to self-transformation. In 1901, when his mother fell gravely ill with typhoid fever, Madero entered a period of deep introspection; he decided that his life, thus far, was a failure. Determined to lead a useful and productive life, Madero quit drinking and smoking and became a vegetarian and an advocate for temperance (Ross 1955, 12-16).

Madero credited this and another crisis—General Bernardo Reyes's violent suppression of a protest in 1903—with his political awakening (Ross 1955, 34). In 1904, Madero made his first entry into politics by organizing the Benito Juárez Democratic Club in San Pedro, marking his first challenge to the Porfiriato. By that point, Díaz had

been in power for three decades and had established a political machine that dominated local politics throughout the country. Other than an emphasis on order and progress, Díaz's interest in consolidating power came before any ideology, as reflected in the Porfiriato's slogan: "lots of administration and little politics" (Knight 1986, 15). Díaz emphasized loyalty, and most governors (as many as seventy percent) were presidential favorites. Local power brokers friendly with the regime, including the Madero family, received political favors such as government contracts (15-19).

Knight (1986) characterizes the Porfiriato as an "artificial democracy" in which "political practice diverged radically from imposed, liberal theory" (19). Corruption and nepotism infected Mexican politics, and the regime regularly disregarded the Constitution when convenient.¹⁶ The regime created an atmosphere that encouraged bribery and the exploitation of the political system for personal gain. Economic activity was inhibited by businesses' need to grease palms rely on the favor of local politicians. While during the first two decades of his reign, Díaz largely threw his weight behind candidates and exploited local political divisions to get preferred officials elected, by the first decade of the 1900s he resorted to blatantly appointing officials. Local political chiefs controlled elections and, as a result, "local elections became a sham," undermining the longstanding democratic traditions in Mexico's municipalities. Local bosses' disregard of hurt the common people, who were subject to arbitrary fines, imprisonment, and deportation at the whims of local chiefs, and infuriated the bourgeoisie, who grew to resent their lack of local political agency. It was this system, in which abusive officials put "private

¹⁶ Knight notes an example in which Díaz allowed the Catholic Church to pray and preach outside church buildings, prohibited by the liberal constitutional reforms of 1857 (19).

interests,” “ambition,” and “egotism” above law and the public good, that Madero later protested in *The Presidential Succession of 1910* (see Madero 1990, 13, 15, 290).

By organizing the Democratic Club, Madero did not expect substantial victories in local elections. Rather, he sought to advance viable candidates that would receive a substantial portion of the vote, thus alerting Díaz to the public’s interest in the democratic process. The Díaz regime, however, dashed his efforts by intimidating opposition candidates, rigging the polls, and persecuting the opposition. The democratic opposition lost on all fronts, having neither elected favored candidates nor demonstrated a public craving for democratic reform. But even despite the Porfiriato’s reaction, Madero rejected violent revolt, “not because of fear, but because of principle... We have faith in democracy” (Madero in Ross 39).

Madero did not retreat from politics despite this early setback, and regularly corresponded with and funded opposition journalists in exile in the United States. He also remained an active Spiritist. Before halting communications for three years in April 1904, the spirit of Madero’s deceased brother Raúl implored the members of Madero’s séance circle to help others. As the fortunate, he insisted they must “do your brothers the most good possible” (CE 158/April 16, 1904) and spread the Spiritist doctrine in order to “bring about a transformation in humanity’s mode of being” (CE 157 April 6, 1904). Madero listened, and advanced the Spiritist cause by serving as editor for a Spiritist periodical, *La Cruz Astral*, and helping organize and finance the First National Spiritist Congress in 1904 (Schraeder 2009, 149-150).

But for Madero, the present state of affairs in Mexico impeded the spread of Spiritism. In a letter to the renowned French Spiritist Léon Denis, Madero stated

It is time to make a grand effort, to prepare the way for Spiritism, because a country whose inhabitants cannot read, where the most terrible despotism reigns without complaint, is not prepared to embrace the cause of Spiritism... *it takes a certain moral elevation*, which permits us to understand and desire *a less material life*.

I believe you have already guessed that for me, it is politics, which I will embrace as soon as there is an opportunity, the ground that I have chosen to fight for our cause. (*EPI* 161/June 26, 1906; see also Tortolero Cervantes 2000a, 123)

Here, for the first time, Madero explicitly links Spiritism with his political work in advancing democracy. His language, which emphasizes the necessity of “moral elevation” and literacy, mirrors the spirit Raúl’s communications about personal spiritual development: as selflessness and intellectual development are the necessary preconditions for personal spiritual development, so are they required for the spread of Spiritism in society. While not transparently Spiritist, Madero’s political discourse employs the higher/lower binary seen in his spirit communications and correspondence. For example, in speaking of the coming gubernatorial elections, Madero condemned the tyranny of Díaz and servility of the people, and spoke of democracy in transcendental terms, writing, “The sacred trust with which our fellow citizens have entrusted us, putting their fate in our hands, should give us a higher idea of our mission” (*AP* 99/May 21, 1905). And if the spirits were silent on political matters between 1901-1904, that changed when Madero resumed automatic writing in 1907.

Embracing the “Higher Mission”: The Spirits’ Return and The Presidential Succession of 1910

Madero resumed automatic writing after a gap of three years (April 17, 1904 – April 16, 1907). During the gap, he continued to fund and participate in the Center for Psychological Studies of San Pedro; he also wrote in Spiritist journals and helped organize and fund the First National Spiritist Congress in 1906, at which he spoke. But it seems he had lapsed in propriety and driven the spirits away, as when the spirit of his deceased brother, Raúl, returned in April 1907, he immediately admonished Madero:

It is with much sadness that we had to leave your side, because in forgetting your higher nature, in disregarding the high and noble mission that you have chosen and that God has given you, and in letting the animal instincts dominate your lower nature, you have committed actions so vile, so disgusting, that we had to part with you, because contacting you was impossible, as these actions broke all bonds of kinship that join you to us (*CE* 163/April 17, 1907).

Madero’s concern with the sorry state of Mexico, it seems, paralleled the spirits’—and, presumably, Madero’s own—distress over his behavior. “Vile” and “disgusting” actions undermined Madero’s noble mission, Mexican’s poor education impeded Spiritism’s spread.

The day after Raúl’s appearance and admonition, a new and unfamiliar spirit, José appeared.¹⁷ He implored Madero to “overcome himself” and “burn... with the noblest sentiments of patriotism and humanitarianism” (*CE* 165/April 18, 1907). José’s valorization of patriotism marks the first of the spirits’ many political exhortations. He spoke of Madero’s “opportunity to engage in an important mission” and begin the fight

¹⁷ Unlike Raúl, who was the spirit of Madero’s deceased brother, José’s identity is unclear. While Spiritist and Spiritualists often channeled spirits of well-known historical figures, José was never identified with a surname, and so we cannot identify him with any specificity.

for the good of humanity (*CE* 169/May 16, 1907), liberty, and justice (*CE* 176/October 30, 1907). He “announced to Madero the great democratic crusade that he would soon undertake and demanded an even greater mastery of his passions” (Rosas Robles 2000, 11), and did so in markedly more militant language than that of 1904 and earlier.

By November 1907, José became Madero’s primary spirit interlocutor, with Raúl making only occasional appearances by 1908. José frequently spoke of fighting or struggle, likened Madero to a soldier of liberty and progress, and employed evocative imagery, such as in his assurance that God would “protect you from the venomous darts of your enemies with his divine emanations” (*CE* 176/October 30, 1907). The spirits’ assurance that God would protect Madero persisted throughout 1907-8, and he sought to allay his family’s concerns about the risks of challenging the Díaz regime through recourse to similar language—using Spiritist idiom that mirrored Christian terminology—when writing his father in 1909 that “I have not the slightest doubt that Providence guides my steps and protects me” (Ross 1955, 57, 64; *EP* 302/January 23, 1909).

The spirits’ prescriptions were often precise. On May 4, 1907, an indeterminate spirit urged Madero to study modern Mexican history (*CE* 167). José reiterates this point on November 30, 1907, imploring Madero to

dedicate yourself to the study of the history of Mexico. Also, you can dedicate some time to prepare work for the Spiritist Congress, in order to take an important part in it and accustom yourself to speaking in public. This will serve you for long after, for you will have confidence in yourself and will have dominated the public. (*CE* 192/December 11, 1907).

In another example, José gives “great importance” to Madero’s participation in local protests, since “it admirably prepares the ground for the next fight and will serve to

make yourself known as a patriot and will make your enemies jealous of your glory” (*CE* 194/December 19, 1907). As I noted, Madero had become so committed to political action by this time that he declined his nomination for the President of the Central Board of the National Spiritist Congress of Mexico, writing to a fellow Spiritist, “I must devote my energies to the next campaign quite soon... I will fight on this earth for the same cause that you defend in another way” (*EPI* 192-3/October 29, 1907, emphasis added). Madero’s reference to “this earth” (*este terreno*) again indicates that he viewed the democratic struggle as the worldly component of a greater spiritual struggle.

In 1908, Madero’s Spirit writings surged, having more than doubled (from 23 to 47) from the year prior. On March 21, José reassured Madero of his “new path” (*CE* 212/March 21, 1908) and urged that he engage in “intense intellectual labor” and give up his *siesta* (*CE* 216/April 30, 1908) to succeed in “the great plan you have conceived” (*CE* 213/April 2, 1908). At some point in 1907-8, possibly when the spirits began encouraging him to study Mexican history, Madero began conceptualizing his landmark political book, *The Presidential Succession of 1910*. On July 18, José instructed Madero to take diligent notes on his studies in a notebook so that he can travel without his books and start writing soon (*CE* 228/July 18, 1908). Eight days later, José reminded Madero of his “transcendental mission,” and assured Madero that 1908 would “be the base of your political career” and that Madero’s book will reveal him to the nation, his “ideals, aspirations, skills, and means of combat. For this reason you should rush to finish your story, tirelessly dedicate yourself to writing your book, because as you write you will receive plenty of inspiration to guide you, so it causes the best effect possible” (*CE*

229/July 26, 1908). And on August 13, José gave Madero the most precise instructions yet: to finish reading *Mexico a través de los siglos*, a five-volume encyclopedic history of Mexico, so that he could finally begin writing (CE 235/August 13, 1908). At other moments, José instructed Madero to write the book's introduction on a particular morning, to splitting some chapters and combining others (CE 242/September 20, 1908), and to send his work to the printer before the end of the year (243/October 2, 1908).¹⁸

The spirits offered similarly precise instructions through 1908, but the bulk of their communications consisted of words of encouragement and assurance. José continually attested to Madero's spiritual elevation and triumph over matter, claiming that Madero's thirty-fifth birthday marked "the end of your animal and beginning of your spiritual existence..." (CE 248/October 30, 1908; see also CE 252/November 5, 1908). He assured Madero of his inevitable victory, his grand destiny, noble mission, contributions to human evolution, humility, admission to the ranks of the liberators of humanity and Mexico, and so on (see, e.g., CE 248/October 27, 1908 and CE 253/November 16, 1908). On November 5, an unnamed spirit announced that Madero had developed the capacity of clairvoyance, or "seeing at a distance while awake" (CE 252).¹⁹ By Madero's own evaluation this was a marked development, in that clairvoyants are "people of great virtue who, by intuition or internal revelation, foresee the great events of human interest" (Madero 2011, K511).

¹⁸ Note that Madero completed the dedication in October, rather than that September morning.

¹⁹ This particular communication is cause for confusion, in that the signatory is Francisco Madero himself. It could not have been a dead relative, as his father (Francisco) was alive.

In the last communication of 1908, a new spirit appeared to Madero. He congratulated Madero on the “on the success that has collected about you, which put you in the position to successfully undertake the colossal task of reestablishing the liberty of México,” and foretold the impact of *The Presidential Succession of 1910*:

Your triumph is going to be brilliant and of incalculable consequence for our beloved Mexico. Your book is going to cause furor throughout the republic: like an electric current that shocks strongly and profoundly, all will rise from the lethargy in which they are sunk.²⁰

The successive work will be of great importance, but the truth is that everything rests on the powerful impression that your book will cause.

We have said that the book is going to cause a tremendous impression on General Díaz, cause him to panic, and freeze in his effort to cling to power.

You must understand that if you succeed in this mission it is because we had agreed before you came on the means to carry it out successfully.

You have to fight a man who is slick, false, and hypocritical. Now you know which are the antitheses that you must put forth: against cunning, loyalty; against falsehood, sincerity; against hypocrisy, frankness.

With this force you will completely paralyze the enemy. (CE 254/Nov. 16, 1908).

This new spirit communicated only his initials, B. J., which Enrique Krauze (1997) and José Natividad Rosales (1973) have plausibly suggested stood for Benito Juárez.²¹ Here we find the spirits’ first explicit equation of General Díaz with the ills of Mexico. In particular, B.J. indicts Díaz for character flaws, such as his clinging to power and being “slick, false, and hypocritical.” The lethargy into which Mexico had been sunk was the product of Díaz’s dominating, selfish character. Likewise, B.J. instructed

²⁰ Electricity, magnetism, and technology more broadly pervaded Spiritist discourse and practice. In his *Spiritist Manual* (2011), for example, Madero gives instructions on how to prove animal magnetism by laying one’s hand on a photographic plate (K465).

²¹ Juárez loomed large in Madero’s political ideology. Madero named his Democratic Club after Juárez, proclaimed himself a liberal in the sense understood by Juárez,” and strongly praised him in *The Presidential Succession of 1910*. See Charles A. Weeks, *The Juárez Myth in Mexico* (Tuscaloosa: University Of Alabama Press, 1987), 78.

Madero to fight Díaz not through revolution, but through loyalty, sincerity, and frankness. Such qualities curried the favor of the spirits, who, as B.J. reminded Madero, would be essential to his coming political success.

With respect to Madero's spirit communications and personal correspondence, *The Presidential Succession of 1910*, published in January of 1909, was relatively measured in tone. This is not to say that its content was not provocative—it was the most forceful critique of the regime to date—but rather that political expediency required that Madero refrain from condemning Díaz wholesale. Madero even praised him for bringing stability and economic prosperity to Mexico and, in a passage reminiscent of the spirits' insistence on Madero's self-discipline, lauds Díaz for his self-mastery, as “only the man who knows how to dominate himself can dominate others” (79).

Though guarded in his use of religious language, Madero hints at the “transcendental” significance of political reform (see, e.g., 199, 240). He invokes a general concept of faith that “knows how to discover the great destinies of nations and to perceive the mysterious hand of Providence which solicitously guides people” (Madero 1990, 205; see also Ross 1955, 64). Elsewhere, however, he employs characteristically Spiritist language, such as when he expresses hope that his book would cause the “fibers of the soul [of the Mexican public and Díaz]” to “vibrate” (3, 245).²² Paralleling his spirit communications, Madero condemns the egotism, ambition, vanity, and cupidity that infect the Porfiriato (see, e.g., 13, 15, 33, 240). Perhaps tellingly, Madero wrote that

²² Spiritualists and Spiritists regularly used language that borrowed from the science of electromagnetism, such as “magnetism,” “vibration,” and “harmony.” For more, see Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

under dictatorship, “the spirits are oppressed by the hand that gently caresses, by a hand that always lavishes material goods” which become “the only means of satisfying ambitions” (13). Tortolero Cervantes rightly notes that Madero employed a distinctly Spiritist lexicon in this passage (2000a, 126), and I would add that Madero’s specific use of the phrase “satisfying ambitions” resurfaced in his *Spiritist Manual* (1910), which was written alongside or slightly after *The Presidential Succession*. This lexicon reflected the Spiritist worldview outlined here, in which spiritual progress is impeded by the patronizing hand of a dictator that imprisons his countrymen in the bonds of animal passions.

Though Madero’s *Presidential Succession of 1910* was a forceful call for reform, Madero did not advocate armed revolution. Madero’s book merely implored Díaz to permit the election of a vice president, a leader who would succeed him only after another term. At the time, Madero explicitly condemned armed revolt in both public and private. He was doubtful that war could grant true liberty since, for him, Mexico was a country plagued by civil wars at the hands of ambitious leaders; he was suspicious about claims that state sponsored violence could grant true liberty. “Francisco Madero wrote as the ‘Apostle of Democracy,’ not as the chieftain of a prospective armed conflict” (Ross 1955, 63).

Madero’s spirit communications of late 1908 and 1909 have gone missing, and those exchanges may have ceased in 1909. As Hendricks Díaz (2000, 299-300) notes, photographs and transcribed excerpts of 1909 communications in Natividad Rosales (1973) suggest that they were primarily from José and concerned Madero’s book.

Sometime in 1909, José assured Madero that the book's publication would "end the hesitations of the independents, who will take your book as a flag and *you as their leader*" (in Natividad Rosales¹⁴⁸, emphasis added). The spirits were right, though they did not anticipate that Madero's "electric current" would transform into revolution.

The Turn Toward Violence

Francisco I. Madero was disinclined toward violence. Henry Lane Wilson, the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, thought Madero "insignificant in appearance" and "of diffident manners and hesitating speech" (Wilson in Ross 1955, 237). Charles Cumberland calls Madero "gentle and emotional," and Stanley Ross, author of Madero's definitive English-language biography, faults Madero for his "excessive sentimentality" and emotionalism (1955, 64, 237). In his canonical two-volume history of the Mexican Revolution, Alan Knight sees Madero as an eccentric, whose commitments to Spiritism, temperance, and vegetarianism signify a general delicacy (Knight 1986, 56). In line with these interpretations, perhaps, Madero explicitly advocated nonviolence and counseled against revolution before 1910.

How, then, did Madero become the figurehead of an armed revolution? And how did he reconcile revolutionary violence with his Spiritist ideals? Madero was not only an unlikely revolutionary, but seems disinterested in political office until shortly before his party's nomination of him as a presidential candidate in April 2010. Immediately following the January 1909 publication of *The Presidential Succession*, Madero's efforts were focused on channeling national political unrest into calls for democratic reform. In

addition to distributing his book and publishing a political periodical, *El Demócrata*, Madero was instrumental forming the Central Anti-Reelectionist Club in Mexico City in May 1909. As the club's figurehead, Madero spent much of 1909 traveling throughout the country giving political speeches and organizing satellite clubs. Shortly after Díaz forced the main opposition candidate, General Bernardo Reyes, into exile in November 1909, the Anti-Reelectionists gained momentum, forming into a party in and nominating Madero as their presidential candidate in April 1910.

In August 1909, amidst this whirlwind of political activity, Madero began writing the *Spiritist Manual*. The book, requested by Mexico's Second Spiritist Congress (Mayo 2011, K91), was a Spiritist catechism in the vein of Kardec's *Spirits' Book*. In it, Madero spoke directly to matters of policy and governance. As Tortolero Cervantes notes, the work advocated for temperance, improvements in public education, and charity. Though characteristic Mexican (and French) Spiritists, however, these positions were standard among Mexican liberals, and even to the era at large. More revealing, I suggest, is a brief section in which Madero describes "the duties of a man toward his country" (K1332) in a chapter on Spiritist Morality. He insists that for the sake of progress and to cultivate the "higher level of its members,"

All inhabitants must concern themselves with public life. They should participate, whether directly or indirectly, by means of their vote and in recognizing the transcendental importance the laws and rights of everyone be respected, for when there is an abuse against a member of the collective, it is an abuse against all. *From the moment a government ceases to respect the law*, there is no rule, only discretion.

Madero continues this barely veiled allusion to Díaz by arguing that "he who infringes upon [the law], whether a commoner or the *highest public official*, commits a crime against his country" (emphasis added). A liberal *par excellence*,

he follows with an invocation of Juárez, the book's sole reference to Mexico and yet another indication of Madero's interest in redeeming Mexican liberalism:

The only way to avoid these disturbances is for each person to respect the rights of others. *No one who wants the best for his country should ever forget that admirable saying of the Great Juárez: "Respect for the rights of others is peace"* (K1365, emphasis added).

At the end of this chapter, Madero directly reengages politics in a commentary on the Lord's Prayer. Commenting on verse one, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name," Madero argues that

from the moment we say, "Hallowed be thy name," we show our desire that all of humanity know that He is our Father and adore Him in spirit and in truth, by means of good works... We must work in the same way towards humanity's progress... This is achieved by passionately propagandizing of all types of progressive and beneficial ideas... though at times, efforts in these spheres are insufficient and it is necessary to act on thornier ground, fighting against bad rulers who slow down any altruistic works, who oppress people, permitting them no liberty, not even to work for their own betterment...

When a people does not enjoy liberty, it is because they are governed by violence and caprice. Those who govern by these means do so in view of satisfying their passions and in no way concern themselves with the progress and well being of the governed. For these reasons, man should fight so that the people where he lives may enjoy complete liberty. He should fight against those who violate liberty, against bad governments that usurp the rights of the people—and without concern for his own life... (K1444).

In advocating progressive, altruistic works, and condemning the leader who governs "in view of satisfying his passions," we see Madero's Spiritist assessment of political issues. Note how closely this language parallels that of *The Presidential Succession of 1910*, to the point that it even employs identical phrases. Just as in his interior life man should triumph over base passions, in matters of government, man should fight against the government that obstructs liberty—particularly the liberty required to work for one's own betterment—through rulers selfish pursuit of their own

desires.²³ Similar language surfaces throughout this political writing of the time. Madero regularly referred to political issues, and particularly suffrage, as “transcendental” (see, e.g., *AP* 22/May 17, 1909 and *AP* 30/June 13, 1909) and Díaz’s government as “personal” and “jealous” (see *AP* 32/June 13, 1909, *MM* 19-20/January 10, 1909). For Madero, dictators’ character, their self-satisfying “violence and caprice” led them to ignore the law and impede “humanity’s progress.” In response, Madero conceded that it is sometimes necessary to fight—in armed combat—against bad rulers without concern for one’s own life.²⁴

Madero finished writing the *Spiritist Manual* in August 1910, and so it is unclear when he penned those strong words in relation to his fateful meeting with Porfirio Díaz in April of that year. Discussing the coming elections, Madero was struck by Díaz’s recalcitrance, and seeing the president had no interest in compromise and intended to hold on to power, wrote to his sister, “Porfirio is not an imposing chief. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to start a revolution to overthrow him. But who will crush it afterwards?” (Madero in Ross 1955, 100). After Díaz jailed Madero a week before Election Day in June 1910 on false charges of aiding a fugitive, Madero and his associates began discussing revolutionary plans, which they discarded for want of organization and supplies. Though Díaz fixed the vote and declared a landslide victory, Madero escaped and fled for San Antonio, Texas, in October 1910. He began preparing

²³ Note that this language parallels that of the Plan of San Luis de Potosí, in which Madero positions himself as “the patriot determined to sacrifice himself, if need be, to obtain liberty and to help the people free themselves from the odious tyranny that oppresses them.”

²⁴ In *Mis Memorias*, Madero explicitly links political action with the doctrine of reincarnation (*MM* 20/January 10, 1909).

the infrastructure for armed rebellion, and in November released the Plan of San Luis Potosí. In it, Madero described himself as a “patriot determined to sacrifice himself, if need be, to obtain liberty and to help the people free themselves from the odious tyranny that oppresses them.” He then called on his “all the peoples of the Republic to rise up together, and take up arms” against Díaz on November 20, 1910 at 6:00 p.m.

At some point during the end of 1910, while in exile in the United States, Madero began drafting his *Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita* (Tortolero Cervantes 2000a, 158). Madero began reading the *Gita* as a youth in Paris, after having been introduced to it by French Spiritists (Ross 1955, 8). His correspondence reveals that both before and during his presidency he continually recommended it to friends, family, and fellow Spiritists (see Tortolero Cervantes 99-100). Madero had long used Arjuna, the *Gita*’s warrior-prince protagonist, as a Spiritist pseudonym, and that he wrote a commentary on it during such a heightened state of political tension is telling. The *Gita* is a story of war, in which prince Arjuna must decide to fight or flee an enemy kingdom led by his cousins. Paralyzed by doubt on the battlefield, the god Krishna appears to Arjuna to remind him of his duties as a warrior and leader, insist that battle can be righteous, and to provide philosophical and religious instruction on issues of devotion, self-cultivation, and selfless action. Commenting on the *Gita*’s opening chapter, Madero (quoting another commentator in full) states Arjuna’s physical battle “symbolizes the struggle between the most noble or spiritual portion of man and the most gross or material,” but notes that to achieve this struggle, it is necessary here to “resort to violence, until the true spiritual man... annihilates the ‘bestial human’” (Madero 2000e, 174).

Madero's commentary for Chapter seven of the *Gita* is even more revealing, in that he interprets bad government as a spiritual obstruction, arguing that if "a person believes that the development of a people is stopped by oppression or tyranny, his duty is to fight those obstacles, having decided in advance to sacrifice if necessary." If that person has conviction and "does his duty... his sacrifice will not be sterile" (227). Later, again insisting on action over asceticism and retreat Madero states, "undoubtedly, a warrior who will fight for the good of his fellow makes a more meritorious act before the Divinity than the priest who is devoted exclusively to religious practices" (292).

Religion scholar Bruce Lincoln notes that "crossing the threshold from non-violent to violent action involves a qualitative leap that can be difficult to accomplish" (2005, 15). The trajectory of Madero's spirit communications and Spiritist writing suggests that, for Madero, Spiritism both motivated his participation in the democratic struggle and justified the use of revolutionary violence in extreme circumstances. Jailed by a faltering regime, Madero was acutely aware of Díaz's obstinacy and the revolutionary fervor that gripped his country. While in the United States, even before his Plan of San Luis Potosí, small battles broke out across the country. Something had to be done in the face of Díaz's selfish cling to power. Madero's Spiritism facilitated the "qualitative leap" from nonviolence to violence, consecrating—and perhaps even motivating—it on the grounds that the Porfiriato's oppression impeded Mexico's spiritual progress. In that way, Madero was not an aberration among Spiritists, though most were disinclined toward violence. Rather, he was acting in accordance with Kardec's *Spirits*

Book, which asked the spirits, “What has been the aim of Providence in making war necessary?” Their answer? “Freedom and progress.”

In February 1911, Madero crossed the border into Chihuahua as the head of a small revolutionary band of about 130 men. He consolidated loyalty among the disparate militias in the northern states, and by May, sacked Ciudad Juárez and declared the city Mexico’s provisional capitol. By no means, however, had Madero transformed into a bloodthirsty and ambitious tyrant. On the contrary, he was so resistant to violence that he sought a compromise with Díaz in Juárez, but was unable to control his forces from taking the city against his command. Despite his tenuous command, Madero remained the figurehead of the revolutionary movement, and was greeted with cheers of “¡Viva Madero!” as he entered Mexico City in early June. Madero immediately called on his countrymen to lay down their arms, quelling much of the near-term revolutionary violence. After a landside electoral victory, Madero assumed the presidency in November 1911.

During his brief tenure as president, Madero proved continually averse to violence, in that he both was slow to suppress rebellions and execute rebel leaders. This reluctance, coupled with his boundless trust, proved suicidal. On February 18, 1913, General Victoriano Huerta, still outraged over Madero’s forbidding him to execute Pancho Villa for disobedience, launched a *coup d’état* and ordered the imprisonment of Madero and his Vice President, Pino Suarez. Four days later, his captors killed them both (see Ross 1955).

Madero remained a Spiritist until his death. Though it is unclear whether he practiced automatic writing in office—if he did, these writings have been lost to history—other actions indicate that he continued to practice Spiritism discreetly. His “eccentricities,” as Alan Knight (1986, 55) called them, attracted ridicule and Madero remained guarded in his public presentation of Spiritism after ascending to power.²⁵ Nonetheless, Madero published the *Spiritist Manual* in 1911, just before taking office, and the *Commentaries on the Bahagavad Gita* throughout 1912, while in office. He wrote the U.S. Spiritualist James M. Peebles in 1911, just after taking office.²⁶ Edith O'Shaughnessy, wife of United States Chargé de Affairs in Mexico, Nelson O'Shaughnessy, wrote that while visiting Madero during an illness, her husband found that “on the little night-table by his side was a planchette [a device for Spirit communications] of dark wood and many bits of crumpled paper were thrown about,” which confirmed “his reliance on the other world, when conducting affairs [of state]” (162). Likewise, Madero’s library holdings show works on Spiritism and psychic research published in 1912, and correspondence indicates he recommended Spiritist periodicals and his *Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita* to friends and family while in office (see Tortolero Cervantes 99-100). Though the documentary record does not afford

²⁵ See, for example, anti-Madero propaganda, “The Lie of Salvation,” that ridiculed Madero’s “trembling epileptic hands,” or used Spiritism to connect Madero to France, in hopes of raising fears about France’s Second Empire. Benson Latin American Collection, Genaro García Collection, Box 3, Folder 12. University of Texas at Austin.

²⁶ See *Light*, November 4, 1911. Unfortunately, lacking Madero’s 1911 correspondence, I have no further information about the nature of this correspondence. Further analysis of Madero’s correspondence with American Spiritualists and French Spiritists, however, might offer a promising embarkation point for a transnational study of Spiritism in the Atlantic world.

much insight into the particulars of his Spiritist practice while in office, that he remained a Spiritist seems almost certain.

Yet without extensive, dated Spiritist source material from Madero's presidency, it is difficult to establish any direct relationship between Madero's Spiritism and his policy initiatives. While Madero's determination to implement democratic procedures throughout the Mexican government (Ross 1955, 224), creation of a Department of Labor, granting freedom to the press (which immediately attacked him), infrastructural projects, and construction of new schools in rural areas (247) were consonant with his Spiritist principles, they were also consonant with Mexican liberalism in its broadest sense. So while Tortolero Cervantes's (2000a, 14) assertion that Madero "enacted" his Spiritist beliefs in policy has merit, it seems even more certain that Spiritism provided the idiom and impulse for those political commitments. For him, the rule of law and democratic reform were of "transcendental" significance and took priority over particular policy objectives. By preventing leaders from ruling without discretion or limit and allowing expression of the "national will" (*AP* 30, 32/June 13, 1909), democracy, for Madero, would bring "freedom and progress." For Madero, Spiritism was both a means and an end: it provided him with a prescriptive worldview for interpreting and transforming his country, which once transformed would be receptive to Spiritist doctrine.

Conclusion

In writing historical narratives, scholars make choices about what evidence is salient and what factors essential in establishing causal connections and explaining change over time. And, for the most part, scholars of Madero have either dismissed or marginalized his religiosity. That approach has its merits, as it demarcates essential elements of Madero's political activity that culminated in his leading the revolution of 1910. Yet in the past decade scholars have increasingly argued that we cannot fully understand Madero and his political engagement without attending to his religious life. I am persuaded by these arguments and think that Tortolero Cervantes's *El Espiritismo Seduce Francisco I. Madero* (2000a) is particularly successful in demonstrating the seriousness of Madero's commitment to Spiritism and suggesting how he "enacted" his religious vision while in policy. Likewise, Tortolero Cervantes helpfully traces the Spiritist networks with which Madero was engaged and their implications for mounting his anti-reelection campaign, and discusses how Madero's Spiritism seems to have engendered a moral disposition that manifested as particular policy positions such as an advocacy of temperance and a commitment to public education.

In this study, I have sought to extend such scholarship through a close reading of Madero's automatic writings and published Spiritist texts. I agree with Schraeder (2009), who suggests that Tortolero Cervantes and others downplay Madero's Spiritist practice for fear that we wrongly remember Madero as an exotic mystic. Whatever label we apply to Madero's religiosity, the extent of automatic writings and Spiritist activity suggests the importance of Spiritist doctrine and practice in his life. "Mystical" or not, Madero

channeled spirits, and the message of the spirits changed over time, shifting from general advice about Spiritist practice to more direct, forceful—even bombastic—political instruction and encouragement. Given Madero’s tendencies toward nonviolence, his qualified advocacy of violence in the *Spiritist Manual* and *Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita*, written at a time of heightened political engagement, suggests the extent to which his eclectic Spiritist worldview guided his political behavior. Spiritism did more than “instill moral values” (Tortolero Cervantes 2000a: 14)—it provided a prescriptive vision of how the world should be and how to bring about that change. Relatively devoid of explicit political content, Madero supplemented a relatively “orthodox” Kardecist vision with democratic principles in his struggle for political reform in Mexico. His was a “transcendental mission”: Madero saw political reform as his reason for being, and he risked his life, family, and fortune to achieve it.

In my attempt to contribute to a fuller picture of Madero, I hope this study encourages further examination of Spiritism and politics more broadly. The Mexican Revolution offers a good case study, and while there are a handful of relevant works (see, e.g. Schraeder 2009, Bastian 2007, Brewster and Brewster 2007, Valdés and Bao 1999, and Arzú 2002), for the most part Butler’s (2007) concern that “religion is very often seen as the *object* of the Revolution, while connections between religious and revolutionary change are ignored” (3) still holds. All too often, historians of the Revolution have reduced complex religious practices to an embrace or rejection of anticlericalism, an approach that obscures a great deal about the piety of Madero. For him, Spiritist affiliation by no means suggested antipathy toward the Church. While

Madero had his misgivings about Catholicism, his amenability to the Catholic Party complicates any simple picture of Spiritism as irredeemably anti-Catholic or anticlerical. Furthermore, religion—particularly eclectic and institutionally loose occult systems such as Spiritism and Theosophy—cannot be reduced to political allegiance, even when those movements were associated with certain efforts at social reform.

In a similar way, given Schraeder's (2009) and the Brewsters' (2007) hints about how Spiritist and Spiritualist discourse and practice permeated Mexican "popular" practice, we might consider employing Catherine Albanese's inclusive category of "metaphysical" religion to the study of Latin America. While focusing on institutional practice in Mexico offers a clear picture of, say, elite Spiritist or Theosophical discourse and practice, these religious systems were not clearly bounded. At the turn of the twentieth century, Latin Spiritists and Anglo Spiritualists were corresponding with one another and debating Theosophy, psychology, and occult innovations. Madero's library holdings included Theosophical, Mesmeric, and psychical works, and he had a membership in a Masonic lodge.²⁷ Madero's Spiritism was broadly inclusive. And, as Albanese shows in the case of the United States, such religious eclecticism was hardly

²⁷ Scholars have not addressed Madero's Freemasonry with any precision. That he was a 33rd degree Freemason is clear, but the extent and nature of its influence on his politics is less so. It was clearly relevant: As Bastian (1989, 2007) and Tortolero Cervantes (2000a) have noted, Freemasonry provided an important discursive space for liberal thought during the Porfiriato. Madero undoubtedly established important connections with other Masons, as many top politicians and members of Madero's cabinet were initiates. But given the lack of sources and my objectives here, I am unable to trace any strong connection between Masonic thought and the specific structure and lexicon of his religio-political worldview. Likewise, I would caution against Bastian's and Tortolero Cervantes's eagerness to elide Freemasonry with Protestantism and other dissident religious forms, and to see Freemasonry (and Spiritism) as equivalent to anticlericalism. While Madero had his reservations about the institution and some doctrines of the Catholic Church, he was not vehemently anticlerical and permitted the establishment of a Catholic political party.

unique—an assertion that I suspect holds across the Atlantic world and up and down the Americas.

As scholars try to trace metaphysical traditions across institutional boundaries it also will mean looking beyond national borders. Even in this narrowly focused historical study of one man from northern Mexico, we find hints of a transnational religious circuit. Madero, a voracious reader fluent in Spanish, French, and English, was attuned to this international metaphysical discourse. His correspondence shows requests for the American Spiritualist periodical, *The Banner of Light*. His library contained several English-language Theosophical and Spiritualist works, and he corresponded with Léon Denis, the prominent French Spiritist, and James M. Peebles, prominent American Spiritualist.²⁸ Spiritism itself, of course, is the product of a transnational circuit: European Hermetecism informed French Mesmerism, which, in turn, informed American Spiritualism, which traveled back to France to be recast by Allan Kardec before reaching Mexico circa 1857.

The case of Francisco I. Madero, then, suggests the import of transnational metaphysical religion at the turn of the twentieth century. Though Madero's spirit communications and treatises would have been fascinating had he never entered politics, that he did—and that he was not alone in this regard—indicate these religious circuits' lasting social and political significance. And they have not disappeared. Although it is a minority tradition, institutional Spiritism remains strong in Cuba and Brazil and persists throughout Latin America and the Caribbean; further, Kardecist ideas, prayers, and

²⁸ I would like to thank Lia Schraeder for providing me with a list of Madero's personal library holdings in religious and psychological studies.

practices have informed other religious traditions and “folk” practices worldwide. For Francisco I. Madero and for so many others, Spiritism was not a curiosity or parlor game, but a gravely serious worldview for interpreting and transforming the world.

Abbreviations

AP	<i>Apuntes Politicos</i> (in Madero's <i>Obras Completas</i>)
CE	<i>Cuadernos Espiritas</i> (in Madero's <i>Obras Completas</i>)
D2	<i>Discursos 2, 1911-1913</i> (in Madero's <i>Obras Completas</i>)
EP1	<i>Epistolario, 1900-1909</i>
EP2	<i>Epistolario, 1910</i>
MM	<i>Mis Memorias</i> (in Madero's <i>Obras Completas</i>)

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