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**The Turn of the Offended:
Clientelism in the Wake of El Salvador's 2009 Elections**

Abstract

Drawing on fieldwork in a Salvadoran municipio during and after the 2009 presidential elections, this article explores how the affective dynamics involved in elections and routine politics might inform us about the conditions of possibility for specific political imaginaries. Passions ran high among ordinary Salvadorans on both the left and right, as allusions to wartime unsettled political divisions and offences. For many disaffected Salvadorans, the victory of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front—a former guerrilla organization—opened up a political horizon previously foreclosed during the post-war era. I show how ordinary Salvadorans' post-election engagement with state officials and FMLN party leaders through clientelist practices evidenced their desire for qualitative state transformation, as well as the extent to which they conceive of themselves as citizens through the state.

[affective milieu; hope; political horizon; elections; clientelism; the state]

...Ahora es la hora de mi turno

El turno del ofendido por años silencioso

A pesar de los gritos...

[Now it's my turn

The turn of the offended after years of silence

In spite of the screams]

Roque Dalton, "El turno del ofendido" (1962)

On the evening of 15 March 2009, former journalist and Salvadoran presidential candidate Mauricio Funes announced publicly the results of El Salvador's fourth democratic presidential elections: the party he represented, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), had won. The FMLN originated as a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla organization in 1980 and became a legalized party at the end of the twelve-year civil war between the FMLN and the Salvadoran state that ravaged El Salvador during the 1980s. The FMLN's victory had no precedent in a country ruled by military dictatorships and elite governments throughout the twentieth century. Since 1989, the right-wing, anti-communist and pro-elite Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) had governed El Salvador, with the FMLN being the primary opposition force beginning with the 1994 elections. For many, the 2009 FMLN victory represented a potential watershed in the country's economic and political situation. Although far from a landslide, the FMLN's victory sparked exhilaration among the many Salvadorans advocating political change. In San Salvador, El Salvador's capital, waves of people dressed in FMLN's red and waving red flags with the party's logo flooded the central streets until late at night. Jubilant after the victory, a vast array of FMLN supporters—young, old, mothers and fathers with children in their arms—screamed, laughed and chanted in

unison, “El pueblo unido jamás sera vencido” [The people united will never be defeated]. Some people turned on their car radios, from which blared FMLN’s election theme songs, featuring refrains such as “Nace la esperanza, viene el cambio” [Hope is being born, change is coming].

The optimism pervading the massive celebrations in San Salvador’s streets echoed the sentiment said to have characterized the celebrations that occurred in 1992 at the end of the civil war (Murray 1997: 2–3). On 16 January 1992, two hundred thousand Salvadorans gathered at San Salvador’s central plaza Gerardo Barrios, singing the insurgent *Sombrero Azul* to celebrate the signing of Peace Accords by representatives of the Salvadoran government and FMLN commanders in Chapultepec, Mexico. Large red flags and FMLN banners, hitherto outlawed, had been laid over the façade of the National Palace and the Metropolitan Cathedral, two of the main buildings surrounding the plaza. The Peace Accords signified for many the positive outcome of a civil war that had otherwise devastated the country economically and killed or disappeared more than 75,000 Salvadorans.

Although the signing of the Chapultepec Accords stirred great expectations among Salvadorans, during the negotiations preceding the accords the FMLN relinquished its commitment to economic reform in order to concentrate on political and institutional changes, thereby allowing successive ARENA governments to continue their implementation of an intense neoliberal agenda that was to transform El Salvador from a monoculture export economy into one based on finance, exacerbating the country’s longstanding problem of rural poverty (Segovia 2002: 178–182). Meanwhile, during the post-war era homicide rates have escalated relative to the last stages of the war (Cruz 1998b: 6; Ramos 2000: 9). Disaffection and disillusionment among ordinary Salvadorans have steadily intensified during the two decades since the war’s end as everyday economic and public insecurities became ever more acute (Cruz 1998a, 2001; Moodie 2010: 145; Silber 2011).

I juxtapose these two celebratory moments in the history of El Salvador to raise questions about how hopes stemming from specific political imaginaries are born, maintained and exhausted. Specifically, drawing on my research in the predominantly rural area of Santiago Nonualco, the second largest municipio in El Salvador's La Paz region, I seek to elucidate how Salvadorans conceive of and relate to the state after their country's 'transition' to democracy. Despite the generalized disaffection and distrust among ordinary Salvadorans vis-à-vis state officials and institutions in the late 2000s, a large portion of El Salvador's population participated actively and passionately in the 2009 elections. In the region where I did my research, many left-wing and disaffected Salvadorans who had placed their hopes in the FMLN regarded this party's victory as an opportunity for redress and began engaging the state through clientelist networks following the election. The ways in which ordinary people engaged political networks, I argue, evidence the degree to which Salvadorans conceive of the state as a legitimate interlocutor—disillusionment and disaffection with democracy notwithstanding. In other words, there has been a genuine aspiration to the state that runs parallel to their disaffection vis-à-vis the *actually existing* state.

A Sense of Possibility

In order to examine popular participation in party politics during El Salvador's elections and their aftermath and to understand the relevance of this participation to state-citizenry relations in a country that has undergone a 'transition' to democracy, I invoke Verdery's (1999: 23–27) appeal to *animate* or *enchant* the study of politics. Verdery (1999: 26) has suggested that we animate the study of politics by “energizing it with something more than the opinion polls, surveys, analyses of ‘democratization indices,’ and game-theoretic formulations that dominate so much of the field of comparative politics.” Accordingly, even as I focus in this article on formal political arenas, elections and routine party politics, I do so by concentrating first on

the passion that pervaded the 2009 elections and then on the sentiment of aggrievement that surfaced soon after.

Elections and clientelism are two arenas of party politics that appear intimately related in El Salvador as well as in many other Latin American countries (see Auyero 2000; Gay 1999; Lazar 2004; McDonald 1997). Electoral processes in El Salvador have involved the mobilization of material resources and favors—especially by ARENA, the governing party until 2009—so as to maintain more or less permanent political clienteles. Clientelism in El Salvador is part of routine politics since this mobilization of resources and exchange of favors does not begin or end with electoral campaigns. In this article I am particularly interested in the frenzied activation of these networks through the FMLN party and the new FMLN-led government in the aftermath of the 2009 elections. After Election Day, many ordinary Salvadorans in Santiago enthusiastically approached party leaders and state officials with various requests and demands. While this may not seem unusual, as I will show later, these Salvadorans relied on clientelism, interestingly, out of a generalized sentiment of having been wronged, historically as well as recently, and with the goal of seeking redress for various kinds of exclusions.

The 2009 presidential elections brought to the fore the relevance of ritualized elements and affective dynamics. As underscored by recent ethnographic research on the procedural elements and party politics of other democratic polities (see Banerjee 2007; Coles 2004; Lazar 2004; McDonald 1997; McLeod 1999), these rituals and affective dynamics—overlooked in previous analyses of elections—shed light on the processes by which voters calculate their stakes in elections. Abstention, which had predominated in El Salvador's elections until 2004,¹ has typically been explained as a symptom of cynicism and disillusionment (Cruz 1998a, 2001). However, from 2004, ARENA's active mobilization of war-related polarized discourse and symbols ignited latent conflicts and passions among

many Salvadorans (Montoya 2013). This exacerbation of ongoing conflicts is rooted in El Salvador's civil war—a domestic episode that evolved into a Cold War battle and was eventually brought to an end with United Nations-brokered peace negotiations, and which nonetheless remains a source of deep social and political division.

I suggest that the unprecedented degree to which the Salvadoran population actively participated in the 2009 elections can be attributed to a complex intersection of passionate feeling and an emerging sense of possibility for political change. In her research on the emergence, development and demise of an AIDS activist group in the United States, Gould (2009: 3) suggests that affect, emotions and feelings can inform us about “political imaginaries and their conditions of possibility”. She regards affect, emotions and feelings as a source of knowledge about what moves people toward political action or inaction. Building on Massumi, Gould (2009: 23–26, 31) contends that affect denotes the visceral yet presupposes sociality; affect allows for an exploration of ambivalence and contradiction that a focus solely on emotions and feelings as qualified and structured states eclipses. Yet, in contrast to Gould (2009: 32), I do not invoke here the concept of affect as a relatively autonomous force but rather as a felt intensity or charge suffusing a particular milieu or environment. This understanding of affect is akin to that advanced in works that have underscored the relationship between subjects and their environments (see Navaro-Yashin 2012: 17–27; Richard and Rudnycky 2009: 73). This article thus contributes to the study of an affective milieu and its relationship to an emerging sense among Salvadorans that specific political imaginaries might actually come about. In other words, I explore how the passions on display in El Salvador's 2009 elections were related to a renewed sense of possibility—that is, to the opening of a new political horizon—for how Salvadorans imagined their relationship to the state.

In examining the relationship between democracy and the collective sentiment of hope, Appadurai (2007) contends that democracy must be built on hope in order to achieve a mass politics and distance itself from tyranny. Within a democratic context, Appadurai suggests that we view hope as emerging from the space between utopia on the one hand and pragmatism and policy on the other. Building upon this delineation that considers hope “about possibilities rather than about probabilities” (ibid.: 30), I suggest that deep post-war disillusionment in El Salvador had gradually eclipsed the intermediate realm of hope. A sense of possibility, however, re-emerged—albeit only temporarily—during the 2009 elections. The emotionally saturated nature of the elections and of clientelist engagements with FMLN’s state officials and party leaders evidenced an aspiration to a state that would provide a redress of wartime and post-war offences and exclusions.

I argue that a focus on both the passion and the deep-rooted sense of indignation and aggrievement among those involved in routine politics in El Salvador can serve as a lens through which to understand Salvadorans’ participation in clientelist networks after the 2009 elections. Specifically, I seek to elucidate how this sudden embrace of clientelism is related to the opening up of a political horizon enabled by the affective milieu of the elections. In the two sections that follow, I depict the affective milieu of the 2009 presidential election and its aftermath and suggest why it can be analytically fruitful to bring this to the fore. In the remainder of the article I suggest that the surge in political clientelism through the FMLN that occurred in the aftermath of the 2009 elections might evidence a deep-seated desire for engagement with the state, and I trace the historical origins of such desire.

The 2009 Elections

On the eve of a visit by ARENA presidential candidate Rodrigo Ávila to Santiago Nonualco on 19 September 2008, I saw a large group of young men sporting t-shirts with ARENA’s

logo heading out towards the rural areas that surround the municipio. Through a window at my host family's house, I watched as they painted all the lampposts on the central Avenida Anastasio Aquino with the blue-white-red evoking ARENA's tri-color flag and plastered walls and house fronts with posters of their candidate. This occurred despite the obvious disgruntlement of residents in Barrio El Ángel, who are overwhelmingly FMLN loyalists. About half an hour later, a couple of my neighbors arrived at the house to swap impressions on an incident that had just occurred nearby. An ARENA member had ripped a poster of FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes off a house front and replaced it with one of Rodrigo Ávila. Irritated, the owner of the house had come out to complain and had begun shouting at the ARENA members until one of them threatened him at gunpoint. My neighbors speculated that the armed men accompanying the ARENA contingent had been paid directly by the regional ARENA deputy, a local from Santiago whom rumors connected to various violent episodes, especially during elections.

Later that evening, a few neighbors, likewise resentful about the new colors imposed on their street and house fronts, assured that the ARENA propaganda would not last long. By 6am the next day, the lampposts, the kerb of the sidewalk, walls, even rocks and tree trunks on the Anastasio Aquino Avenue were covered with red paint symbolizing the FMLN. Posters of Mauricio Funes and FMLN flags had reappeared. I asked a neighbor about the chameleonic transformation of the street that had occurred overnight. He explained that ARENA members had been guarding their work until midnight. FMLN loyalists had waited until they left and then proceeded to paint over ARENA's work, burn the ARENA flags, and plaster posters of Mauricio Funes over those of Rodrigo Ávila. "El Barrio El Ángel es *zona liberada*" [The El Ángel neighborhood is a *liberated zone*], this neighbor declared proudly, using an expression employed by guerrillas during the war to denote FMLN strongholds. This confrontation over the color of the neighborhood was not an isolated incident in Santiago but

one that was occurring ever more frequently as the 2009 elections approached. Tensions escalated to the point of fights and gunfire, as recounted publicly by those involved on both sides. National media outlets reported similar incidents nationwide. This election-related violence was not unprecedented in Santiago; during the campaign of the 2004 presidential elections two ARENA loyalists had been run over and killed while plastering their party's propaganda throughout the Coastal Road that crosses the municipio.ⁱⁱ

In 2008 and 2009 I closely followed the elections in Santiago Nonualco. Observing the electoral strategies of the various parties often entailed travelling with their leaders and constituents to various sectors of Santiago as well as to neighboring municipios and San Salvador, thereby allowing me to draw comparisons among different municipios and regions. When I arrived in El Salvador on 1 August 2008, the electoral campaign for the municipal and legislative elections to be held on 18 January 2009 and the presidential elections on 15 March had not yet officially commenced. Yet the main parties' constituencies had already been campaigning for two years, their frantic activity and passion steadily gaining momentum as the elections approached. ARENA and FMLN constituents had been organizing support groups in urban and rural areas to secure votes and labor force for the coming elections. Their work, as described above, had often incurred tension and conflicts as members of both parties sought to dominate and win votes in neighborhoods and municipios whose residents lacked clearly defined political allegiances. Much of the tension stemmed from the fact that ARENA and FMLN represented the opposing sides of El Salvador's civil war in the 1980s. This wartime parallel was evident in some of the incidents I witnessed during and after the electoral campaign.

A few months before the presidential elections, Marta, the seventy-year-old woman who heads my host family, was chatting with a friend below a prominent poster of Mauricio Funes that she had strategically placed so that it could be sighted from the street. Pointing to

the poster, her friend remarked in a low voice: “If Ávila wins the elections, you may regret this. You should be careful”. Rodrigo Ávila, one of El Salvador’s former police directors, was rumored to have participated in death squads during the war and many speculated on the repression he might unleash against FMLN supporters if ARENA won the election. Marta appeared to disregard her friend’s advice. However, in the intimacy of her home, she would repeatedly insist that we all—her son, daughters, and me as well—have our passports ready. “If this man [Rodrigo Ávila] wins the elections, there is going to be *matazón* [slaughter],” she would say. This was consistent with rumors exchanged among other FMLN loyalists about gunmen hired by ARENA to kill FMLN leaders during the elections. Indeed, many insisted that a significant number of the daily homicides in El Salvador were politically motivated.

Meanwhile, rumors circulated among ARENA loyalists about the dire consequences of an FMLN regime. Immediately after the FMLN victory in the 2009 presidential elections, I learnt about rumors in various sectors of Santiago that several old women had literally fallen sick with worry over what the FMLN would do with those no longer able to work. ARENA members had disseminated rumors about how a communist regime would conduct a purge of the elders. A relative of my host family from a rural sector told of her neighbor’s eighty-year-old mother, who remained bedridden and hysterical over what she feared the new government would do with her. Interestingly, so pervasive was the anxiety about the electoral outcome that I identified similar fears among FMLN supporters. At a post-election meeting of the local FMLN leadership, a man with a profitable business that imports vehicles from the United States, clearly distressed, asked one of the party’s regional deputies whether the FMLN would actually enact a socialist regime and intervene to take private property away from people. The deputy calmed him down explaining that no private property would be touched and that this FMLN government would only give impetus to the possibility of a future socialist state.

Both FMLN and ARENA loyalists thus participated in the affective dynamics at work during the 2009 elections, when fear became a popular currency of relations on both the left and right. Yet, in order to understand what underlies contemporary El Salvador's political polarization in the context of the 2009 elections and the clientelist relationships that developed in its aftermath, an historical excursus is in order. FMLN and ARENA originated in the midst of the Cold War and were inspired by the Manichean discourse and political identities of that era. The FMLN was born in October 1980 out of the union of five political-military organizations that had formed and developed in El Salvador throughout the 1970s in response to growing economic and political exclusion (Almeida 2008). Their militarization was also encouraged by the Cubans' overthrowing of Batista's regime in 1959 and later by the triumph of the Sandinista revolution at the close of the 1970s. The aim of uniting the disparate organizations into the FMLN was to defeat the Salvadoran government militarily and eventually enact a socialist regime. The FMLN embraced Marxism-Leninism, conceiving of the state as an elite instrument and democracy as a mere façade under which the country's military and economic elites pursued their interests through the state (Martín Álvarez 2010: 11). The option of reforming capitalism was rejected; FMLN leaders instead called for armed revolution as the path to socialism, with a vanguard of intellectuals playing a fundamental role in unleashing this revolution. In rural areas particularly, it was the influence of liberation theologyⁱⁱⁱ that led much of the population to join and support the armed struggle (Peterson 1997).

The founding of ARENA in 1981 stemmed from discontent among members of El Salvador's landed elite with the agricultural reforms enacted by the governing Christian Democratic Party (PDC), which had followed the failed reformist-minded military junta formed after the 1979 coup. ARENA was founded as an anti-communist and conservative party. It supported harsh U.S.-funded counter-insurgency measures during the war, and the

party's main leader, Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, was held responsible for the creation of death squads and the orchestration of political assassinations. Economically, ARENA embraced a neoliberal agenda that transferred wealth into finance, thereby facilitating a great degree of elite re-composition after the collapse of the agro-export model of accumulation (Segovia 2002).

ARENA won its first presidential election in 1989. This victory, along with the control of El Salvador's Legislative Assembly, allowed its members to enact an intense neoliberal agenda, which included the country's gradual dollarization since 2001 and the deregulation and privatization of state-owned sectors, including public utilities. The widespread disfavor that greeted these measures notwithstanding, ARENA has amassed a significant number of votes from the country's rural populations in ensuing post-war elections. The party's success at the polls stemmed partly from the political clientelism it practiced in rural areas, specifically, the hiring of political allies and the distribution of goods among those who showed allegiance during electoral campaigns. While disaffection and abstention have predominated in the post-war elections, both ARENA and FMLN have managed to maintain core constituencies through, on the one hand, ideological affinity and wartime family experiences and, on the other, clientelism. Since the 2004 elections, the support ARENA has received from rural populations in regions like La Paz has also been rooted in the fears about the FMLN. As of 2004, ARENA's mobilization of anti-communist discourse and symbols, along with the FMLN's own dogmatism, fed anxiety about an FMLN victory in the presidential elections. Yet, despite ARENA's support from rural populations, a popular view has remained—on both the right and the left—of the ARENA-ruled state as elitist and standing in opposition to the poor masses. This view of the state is partly rooted in the Marxist analyses popularized in the 1970s and 1980s by political and military organizations as well as popular movements led by progressive priests who espoused liberation theology.

These analyses have crystallized in the popular reference to the ARENA-ruled state as “the 14 families,” which denotes the concentration of economic and political capital among a small elite.

El Salvador’s 2004 and 2009 presidential elections, in short, marked a significant increase in the passion and fear experienced by party loyalists and opponents respectively. The strategies and passions associated with the 2009 electoral campaign amounted to a re-enactment of the war that stirred wartime memories and unresolved tensions among significant segments of the Salvadoran population (Montoya 2013). Not only were these elections more disputed than prior ones, but they also managed to *move* a large portion of the Salvadoran population. Certainly, the politics of fear practiced by ARENA in 2009 and the unresolved wartime conflicts that this politics evoked played an important part in inciting passionate political participation. At least among core FMLN constituencies, a sentiment of aggrievement predominated, stemmed from the 20 years of consecutive ARENA governments that had ruled the country since the war. In the eyes of many FMLN supporters, these governments were the embodiment of wartime repression and the power of an elite that had historically accumulated wealth through labor-intensive agriculture.

Yet the FMLN did not win the elections simply by capitalizing on wartime grieves and anxieties and solidifying the support of its core constituencies, but by amassing the votes of Salvadorans disillusioned by the persistent inequality and daily homicides of the post-war era. It is necessary to underscore the tremendous sense of promise represented by the FMLN, which until 2009 had been unable to govern and hence to disappoint, and which for many represented the possibility of a radically different political project. FMLN presidential candidate Mauricio Funes played a crucial role in the party’s popularity. A charismatic left-wing journalist and human rights advocate, Funes had had no prior attachment to the FMLN. In addition to representing a position independent of the FMLN, he addressed pressing social

and economic issues during the campaign. In a speech delivered during a visit to Santiago on 10 March 2009, Funes stressed his commitment to, among other things, providing credit and assistance to those working the land as well as social housing and other subsidies for poor families. These were important concerns for largely rural municipios like Santiago. His candidacy thus embodied for many the possibility of significant change and, as I will show next, the opening up of opportunities for demanding redress for previous offences, whether rooted in the wartime or post-war eras.

“It’s Our Turn Now”

The day after the presidential elections, Mauricio Funes addressed a massive audience of FMLN loyalists celebrating their victory in San Salvador with the following declaration:

“Ahora es el turno del ofendido, ahora es la oportunidad de los excluidos, ahora es la oportunidad de los marginados, ahora es la oportunidad de los auténticos demócratas” [Now it’s the turn of the offended, now it’s the opportunity of the excluded, now it’s the opportunity of the marginalized, now it’s the opportunity of the authentic democrats].^{iv} His paraphrasing of Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton was consistent with the rhetoric of change that had typified the FMLN 2009 electoral campaign. During the campaign, Funes and the FMLN had criticized the deepening of economic and public insecurity that had occurred during the twenty years of ARENA rule. Rather than proclaiming a transition to socialism or the reversal of ARENA’s neoliberal agenda, Funes had proposed a greater inclusiveness. Funes and the FMLN had presented themselves as “el partido del pueblo” [the party of the people] in direct opposition to the elitist party ARENA. In this sense, Funes’s utterances the day after the elections emphasized that the FMLN victory was more than just the replacement of one party by another; its victory marked an opportunity for inclusion of those who had been excluded both historically and during the ARENA governments.

In the days and months that followed, I noted events, actions and conversations in Santiago suggesting that ordinary disaffected and left-wing people perceived the FMLN victory in much the same way that Funes had suggested in his telling speech, that is, as an opportunity for redress. Soon after the FMLN victory, my friend Elena, a middle-aged woman I had known since my first visit to Santiago in 2001, turned her celebratory mood into proactive efforts to shift control of the public hospital at which she worked from pro-ARENA doctors and administrators to those supportive of the FMLN. She and some of her colleagues at the Santa Teresa Hospital in Zacatecoluca, La Paz's regional capital located a twenty-minute drive away from Santiago, joined forces to appoint a new director. "You don't know what the *Areneros* [ARENA members and loyalists] have done to the hospital", she would say to me. "They have pilfered the hospital's medicines and materials to cater to their own private clinics in San Salvador. Do you remember the case I mentioned to you of a poor seventy-year-old woman who had surgery to receive a prosthesis implant? She bought the prosthesis, and the doctor who did the surgery implanted her with an old prosthesis that he had removed from another patient. Within a few days the woman stopped walking and ended up in San Salvador, in El Rosales [Hospital]. The relatives told me that at some point they had suspected some irregularity during the surgery, and I couldn't help but tell them what I had learnt about the prosthesis replacement from the nurse who had assisted the doctor during the surgery. These *Areneros* have no shame about taking advantage of the very poorest!" she exclaimed acrimoniously.

Complaints from Elena and her colleagues were also directed at the alleged corruption surrounding the reconstruction of the hospital, still unfinished in 2009. The building of the Santa Teresa Hospital had been severely damaged by two earthquakes that struck La Paz in 2001. The building was abandoned thereafter, aside from a few administrative offices that remained on the ground floor. All patients, practice and surgery rooms, and machines, were

relocated in insalubrious portable cabins, where they remained in 2009. Although the ARENA government had received funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to rebuild the hospital by 2009, the funds had been exhausted and the work halted by 2008, before the building had been finished.^v Given these circumstances, Elena and her colleagues saw the FMLN victory as an opportunity to subvert the *Areneros*' political control of the hospital. In the months following the elections, they wrote petition letters to the Health Minister and met with various FMLN leaders they knew in La Paz, one of whom managed to arrange a meeting with the Minister. Elena and her colleagues saw the meeting as an opportunity to explain in person to the Minister why they wanted her to appoint a new hospital director and to hand over to her the hundreds of signatures they had collected in support of the appointment of one of their colleagues, an FMLN member, as hospital director. Weeks after the meeting, the Minister acceded to their request.

Similar excitement characterized the expectations of many Santiagueños regarding the FMLN's opportunity to capsize ARENA's control and partisan management of *Semilla Mejorada* [Improved Seed]. A state-funded program launched in 2006 with the goal of alleviating the debts incurred by small-scale peasants, *Semilla Mejorada* had in practice operated as a local patronage project. ARENA party leaders, rather than state institutions, distributed agricultural consumables, thus employing the program to remunerate those rural dwellers who had actively supported the party and to court others in hopes of securing their votes. Santiago is a predominantly rural municipio, employing nearly half of its population in agriculture—the economic activity offering the lowest salary along with domestic labor. This being the case, the distribution of seeds and fertilizer effectively granted ARENA a large political clientele, while excluding political opponents from the program.

In the months leading up to the presidential elections, I overheard many conversations about ARENA's distribution of goods to those joining the party and attending its weekly

public meetings in Santiago on Sundays. I witnessed one of those famed *Semilla Mejorada* distributions. On my way to the municipio market, I saw one day that a crowd had gathered around the ARENA headquarters. Inside, I saw a large pile of two-pound bags of beans. An ARENA leader explained to me that the party was concerned about the welfare of the country's rural populations and that *Semilla Mejorada* was ARENA's program to assist the poorest citizens. Immediately thereafter, I heard another ARENA leader explain to a sixty-year-old man wearing a typical peasant hat that only ARENA members would be receiving the beans. The ARENA leader suggested that this man join the party so as to become eligible for future distributions. Following his advice, the man joined a queue consisting mainly of middle-aged and elderly men wearing similar peasant-like garb. They were all signing up as ARENA members on the expectation to benefit from future distributions of agricultural consumables.

While the partisan nature of this program had been widely criticized by FMLN supporters during the election, after the FMLN victory many of them began harboring the hope that it would now be their turn to benefit from *Semilla Mejorada* and other programs. To communicate their pressing needs, these disaffected and left-wing Santiagueños met with local FMLN leaders, invited FMLN deputies to their neighborhoods and communities, or visited ministers and other FMLN state officials in their offices, so as to make them aware of the public works most urgently needed in their communities or ask for more personal favours such as jobs.

A different, though just as fervent, sort of hope was harbored by those who expected the FMLN government to redress wartime human rights violations. Several Santiagueños approached local FMLN leaders as well as one of the regional deputies after the elections to ask whether there was a way to find out what had happened to their relatives during the war—whether they had disappeared or been killed and buried in one of the numerous unmarked

mass graves scattered throughout the country. Still intimidated by their memories of the death squads and paramilitary groups that operated with impunity in La Paz during the war, many residents of Santiago and neighboring municipios had made no attempt to learn the whereabouts of their disappeared during the twenty years of ARENA rule. The new FMLN government, they believed, provided a more appropriate milieu in which to ask these questions.

Until then, post-war efforts to address the war and wartime human rights violations had been marginal and limited to the work of a few grassroots organizations and NGOs. The Father Cosme Spessotto Committee, which consists of relatives of wartime victims and victims themselves, is a grassroots organization performing memory work in La Paz since 2005. During the elections, Committee members wrote letters outlining their requests to Mauricio Funes and several candidates for the legislative and municipal elections with whom they were familiar. They too celebrated the FMLN's victory in the presidential elections as an opportunity to redress human rights violations and demand compensation, both moral and material. With that goal, they designed a program to compensate war victims and, through personal networks within the FMLN as well as NGOs, managed to meet several times to discuss their proposal with Vanda Piñato, Funes's wife and the country's Social Inclusion Secretary after the FMLN victory.

Mauricio Funes's victory speech, in sum, seems to have echoed a predominant post-election feeling among ordinary people who had supported the FMLN during the electoral campaign. "It's our turn now" was explicitly articulated by some and implied by others in their proactive engagements with state officials and FMLN party leaders after the elections. These engagements took a range of forms, from the goal of securing material benefits via the party to the search for redress for exclusion and wrongdoings during both the wartime and post-war eras. In this sense, Funes's speech and explicit reference to "the turn of the offended"

captured a generalized feeling of exclusion and aggrievement. Ordinary people in Santiago were offended by the under-funded, ruinous and corrupted state of El Salvador's public health care; offended by their own exclusion from state-funded programs and the absence of public utilities and public works in their communities; offended by the 1993 Amnesty Law passed by the ARENA governments that imposed silence regarding wartime human rights violations and precluded both retributive and restorative justice. The FMLN victory offered an opportunity for redress and thus for the envisioning of qualitative state transformation, which in turn inspired Salvadorans to attempt to reactivate their relationship to the state through personal networks. These attempts would turn out to be short-lived, as in many cases people soon realized their requests would not be fulfilled.

Citizenship through the State

As described above, after the 2009 elections I witnessed or heard about innumerable attempts by ordinary people in Santiago, as well as other municipios in La Paz, to meet with and make requests of newly appointed state officials. Channeled through letters, phone calls and visits, these initiatives were coeval yet uncoordinated; most had not been preceded by much organizational effort. Prior to the elections, Elena and her colleagues had not planned to shift ARENA's control of the hospital where they worked. Likewise, it was only after the elections that those seeking to benefit from *Semilla Mejorada* and other state-funded programs from which they had been excluded made efforts to negotiate with FMLN leaders to insist on their inclusion in these programs or expound their requests. Such was also the case for those who suddenly decided to ask about relatives who had disappeared or were assassinated during the war in the 1980s. Although members of the Father Cosme Spessotto Committee had already written letters addressed to Funes and other FMLN members, it was the FMLN victory and

Funes's declaration that it was now "the turn of the offended" that encouraged them to embark on the designing of a program of compensation for war victims.

Interestingly, all these initiatives were channeled through the FMLN's clientelist networks. Clientelism has historically been a salient trait of El Salvador's routine politics. During nineteenth- and early twentieth-century elections—whether national or local—patron-client relations were very much in play in El Salvador (Ching 2014: 36–43). Rival patronage-based networks, linking members of the landed elite and peasants through clientelist and other bonds (familial, ethnic, and so on), served as the basis for arranging an electoral outcome prior to an election. It is important to note that peasants were not simply subordinated in this relationship of patronage; often they enjoyed a bargaining position. In contemporary El Salvador, elections work in much the same way—although networks are mobilized through more complex relationships, ideology playing a crucial role in maintaining core constituencies. During post-war elections, well-known members of both ARENA and FMLN (very often regional deputies) have acted as political bosses whom people approach to ask for favors. ARENA—being able to mobilize considerably more resources—has even temporarily hired local allies who are leaders in their communities, thereby being able to amass a significant number of votes.

What is distinctive about post-war El Salvador, however, is that the web of relationships constituted by clientelism has among other things served as a means through which people circumvent state institutions and officials for reasons that have as much to do with fear and distrust of the state as with its presumed inefficiency (Montoya 2011: 189–195). Many ordinary Salvadorans regard both political and personal networks as safer, more trustworthy and more efficient channels than bureaucracies for dealing with pressing needs. Underreported cases of extortion and other crimes, as well as claims for jobs, housing and other basic needs not channeled through state institutions, are dealt with through

acquaintances with political connections or relatives who can penetrate the relevant state institutions. Yet, what I found notable about political clientelism in El Salvador after the 2009 elections was its twofold functioning as a means through which people sought redress from previous state offences as well as a means through which they asserted an aspiration to a different relationship vis-à-vis the state.

Letters, phone calls and visits—the means through which people in Santiago engaged with FMLN state officials following the elections—testified to their desire for a state that listens, cares and delivers. The ensuing face-to face encounters satisfied people’s aspiration to establish a more personalized relationship with the state. Lazar (2004) has suggested that enthusiastic embracement of political clientelism among the poor in the 1999 local elections in El Alto, Bolivia, served as a means to ‘substantiate citizenship’ by making democracy more personalized, accountable and representative.^{vi} She finds that, in stark contrast to liberal definitions of citizenship and democracy as disengaged, delegative and based on rational decisions, clientelism allows ordinary people to directly engage politicians and effectively even to stand for election themselves, inasmuch as they benefit from their party’s victory by obtaining jobs in public office. While we could discuss whether increased substantive citizenship actually results from political clientelism in El Salvador, the FMLN victory inspired left-wing and disaffected people to envision a qualitative and more permanent transformation of the state itself—from the elitist state ruled by ARENA to one truly representing the Salvadoran people.

The widespread practice of clientelism in post-war El Salvador suggests that the state is very much defined along party lines. Indeed, during the twenty years of ARENA rule, bureaucracies were saturated with ARENA loyalists to such a degree that once ARENA lost the presidential elections, ARENA deputies made sure a law was passed in the Legislative Assembly to hinder a massive replacement of public officials by the new FMLN

government.^{vii} It is thus not surprising that a change of party could elicit the idea of deep transformation, of regime shift. The FMLN portrayed itself as “the party of the people” throughout the 2009 elections, evoking the FMLN’s roots in the country’s peasant population as well as in its aspiration to an alternative state project. It may have been this representation that led left-wing people to think that they could now visit the offices of high-profile state officials and even take the initiative to make suggestions to, and requests of, the state. I argue that Salvadorans’ political horizon—which opened with the Peace Accords in 1992 and later foreclosed in the face of increasing post-war disillusionment—opened up again with the 2009 elections. Once again, as during the 1970s and 1980s, left-wing and disaffected Salvadorans embraced the possibility that the state might actually represent and work for the people.

Specifically, the desires, aspirations and expectations that ordinary Salvadorans have invested in the idea of the state as a political subject and the central role that this idea plays in their political imaginaries may be related in part to the liberal traditions of Latin America and their coalescence throughout the twentieth century with emancipatory and socialist ideologies. As Baud (2007) has observed with regard to indigenous groups’ quest for citizenship in the Andean countries, throughout the twentieth century the republican tradition of these countries led increasingly to the nation-state’s becoming a legitimate interlocutor and hence the basis for definition and entitlement of citizenship rights and responsibilities. Meanwhile, the reverberations of liberation theology in El Salvador’s rural areas as well as the later dissemination of international human rights rhetoric—although perhaps of limited penetration—should not be underestimated in promoting the state as the primary entity on which the claims and demands of ordinary people regarding citizenship rights are placed. Even more important is the historical conjuncture afforded by the rise of the so-called New Left in Latin America, which has provided a regional context in which new state-citizenry pacts have been forged, including a ‘return of the state’ as the subject morally responsible for

delivering socioeconomic and political rights (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012). Yet, as already illustrated, in El Salvador the channels through which post-election demands were placed on the new FMLN ruled-state were not state bureaucracies but the more personalized routes provided by clientelist practices.

Overall, given their efforts to channel their post-election petitions through state officials—albeit through those that are part of clientelist networks—I suggest that Salvadorans think of themselves as citizens *through* the state. Gordon and Stack (2007: 120) have suggested that citizenship cannot be reduced to a relationship with the state and have exposed the historical contingency of the state-citizenship coupling. They contend that, given the state roll-back of the neoliberal era, it is more appropriate to think in terms of citizenship *beyond* the state. I argue, however, that even as clientelism—as a circumvention of state institutions—might affirm such a delineation, the aspiration of ordinary Salvadorans in a rural municipio to be received by state officials and to channel their requests through them is rather indicative of the extent to which the state in contemporary El Salvador is conceived as a chief political subject.

Conclusion

An examination of El Salvador's 2009 elections has facilitated an understanding of how a particularly affective milieu might fuel hopes and in turn political action. El Salvador's 2009 presidential election and the victory of Mauricio Funes and the FMLN in this election elicited a political imaginary that had dissipated during the post-war era. 'Democratic disenchantment' (Moodie 2010: 145) had become a predominant sentiment due to the minimal economic reform stipulated in the Peace Accords and the gradual roll-back of the state—with the exception of its punitive and military functions and minimal poverty alleviation programs—that consecutive ARENA governments had enacted as part of their neoliberal agenda. The

passionate involvement in party politics by people on both the left and right rekindled wartime conflicts as well as the hopes and fears thereof. Among left-wing Salvadorans, there was a renewed sense of possibility vis-à-vis the political project for which they had fought and lost relatives during the war. Partly due to Funes's candidacy, the elections sparked hopeful feelings not just among the FMLN's core constituencies but also among segments of the Salvadoran population disaffected by the ARENA governments yet initially dubious of the FMLN due to this party's dogmatism during the post-war era.

After the FMLN victory, passions continued to run high. During the first few months of FMLN government, both left-wing and disaffected Salvadorans suddenly made proactive efforts to activate FMLN clientelist networks that would enable face-to-face encounters with state officials. Opportunistic attempts to benefit from an FMLN government coalesced with a desire for redress—this understood as compensation for various forms of exclusions and offences, both historical and recent. All of this, channeled through clientelist networks involving state officials evidenced the central role of the state in ordinary people's political imaginaries and aspirations. If a particular historical logic of accumulation explains why the state has remained a discrete entity in the minds of ordinary Salvadorans on both the left and right, the syncretic legacy of liberalism and emancipatory ideologies, along with a regional trend of refashioning state-citizenry relationships and forms of democratic participation, explain how it is that the notion of the state retains a central place in Salvadorans' imaginaries. I have thus suggested that despite the disillusionment, distrust and fear of state institutions that I observed both before and after 2009, Salvadorans aspire to a political project in which the state plays an important part. It was after all the intensely passionate milieu of the 2009 elections that rekindled wartime desires for state transformation and political action towards that project.

Notes

ⁱ Until then, only the 1994 elections—El Salvador’s first democratic elections—had surpassed a 50 percent turnout (Artiga-González 2004: 38).

ⁱⁱ See ‘Un muerto durante cierre de campaña’, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 19 March 2004; ‘Entierran activista arenero’, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 20 March 2004.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Liberation theology” is the progressive Catholic doctrine with origins in the 1968 Latin American Conference of Catholic Bishops in Colombia, which in turn was influenced by the Second Vatican Council. This progressive hermeneutics, disseminated throughout much of Latin America during the 1970s by priests and laypeople, incorporated Marxist categories of analysis and a critique of capitalism (Planas 1986).

^{iv} ‘Funes: “llegó el turno del ofendido”’, *Faro de Vigo*, 16 March 2009.

^v ‘El terremoto que duró 10 años’:

<http://www.elfaro.net/templates/elfaro/especiales/hospital/nota01.php>

^{vi} Although such a discussion is beyond the scope of this article, one could suggest to the contrary that clientelism is tantamount to charity insofar as it undermines the notion of citizens as equal rights-bearers (Boltvinik and Hernández cited in Gledhill 2005: 81).

^{vii} The Civil Service Law was passed before the FMLN took office in June 2009.

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