

2 The Violence of Cold War Polarities and the Fostering of Hope

The 2009 Elections in Postwar El Salvador

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Many Salvadorans do not vote. Abstention has been high since the late 1980s, with only the 1994 elections surpassing a 50 percent turnout (Artiga-González 2004). After the 1994 elections, popularly known as the “elections of the century” for inaugurating El Salvador’s democracy (Cruz 1998), voter turnout fell once again. This decreasing turnout has been interpreted as a symptom of disillusionment with the postwar era and lack of confidence in prospects for peace (Cruz 1998; 2001). The Chapultepec Peace Accords, and the “transition” that followed, focused on political and institutional reforms, neglecting the problems of economic inequality and human rights at the root of the civil war. Postwar privatization of public utilities such as health care and water, increasing unemployment, and rising inflation have only heightened economic insecurity and dependence on migrant remittances. Additionally, homicides and crime, which escalated after the war ended, have stabilized at levels so high that El Salvador ranks among the most violent countries in Latin America (Ramos 2000).

Despite Salvadorans’ “democratic disenchantment” (Moodie 2010, 145; and this volume) and skepticism about the potential of elections to effect change, turnout at both the 2004 and 2009 presidential elections virtually doubled from that of previous years (IDHUCA 2004, 23; TSE 2009). Why did Salvadorans vote in the 2009 elections, and participate in campaigns and other related events? This chapter underlines the relevance of wartime rhetoric and symbols to understand Salvadoran voting in 2009. More than other arenas of Salvadoran political life, electoral politics has recreated the divisions of the past, thereby reintroducing unresolved wartime frictions into public discourse.

The 2009 electoral campaign, I argue, allowed Salvadorans to engage—publicly and in a relatively controlled manner—in wartime conflicts with which many of them had not come to terms. Recriminations and hostility between the governing right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) and the former guerrilla organization Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) have characterized the postwar elections since 1994 (Ramos 1998), but ARENA’s mobilization of mass media propaganda to enact a

politics of fear in 2004 and 2009 arguably made frictions all the more palpable. The question, then, is what moved so many Salvadorans to vote for the FMLN in the 2009 elections given ARENA's politics of fear? The answer can be found in the campaign of Mauricio Funes, the 2009 FMLN presidential candidate. Funes attempted to transcend a Cold War divide re-enacted by ARENA and FMLN. He addressed pressing social and economic problems, appealing to both the left and the right.

Fieldwork in Santiago Nonualco before, during, and after the presidential elections held on 15 March 2009 provided insights into how Salvadorans perceived and experienced this postwar election. Santiago is a *municipio* (municipality) in the south-central La Paz Department. The population of this rural area practices subsistence agriculture and works in commerce or in the *maquila* factories in the region's offshore El Pedregal zone. Though not considered a former war zone, Santiago nonetheless reflects the nation's historical wartime divisions. During the electoral campaign, I attended meetings and rallies of all political parties, held informal conversations with their leaders and constituents, and participated as an international observer on Election Day. Given the heightened animosities characterizing this election, informal conversations about electoral politics cropped up constantly in mundane situations and among people not formally involved in the campaigns.

To some degree, Santiago can be seen as a microcosm of the polarized conflict that persisted in the country during the 2009 presidential elections. Interestingly, since 2000, Santiago has been governed by the National Conciliation Party (PCN), once the dominant military party but now a minority party that has served chiefly as a supporter of ARENA in the Legislative Assembly.¹ The differences in how people cast their votes in municipal and presidential elections are symptomatic of a disjuncture between the citizenship practices that concern the polity of the *municipio* and those of the nation (see Stack 2003). In other words, while haunting Cold War imageries and memories may patently impact national citizenship, their influence is more limited during the municipal elections of a place like Santiago, where a third party governs. Although the PCN's presence does yield a difference between municipal and presidential elections, the study of municipal elections is beyond the scope of this chapter.

In the Absence of a Public Discussion

The 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords that marked the end of El Salvador's twelve-year war included the creation of a Truth Commission to investigate and point to those responsible for wartime human rights violations.² Its 1993 report included basic information on certain high-profile cases, such as the

El Mozote massacre and Archbishop Romero's assassination (United Nations 1993). It asserted that in order for Salvadorans to reconcile, further investigations on human rights violations were required—although the report was not explicit about how this should be done. These investigations would in turn provide the grounds for moral reparation and adequate material compensation.

Immediately after the commission's recommendations were put forward, El Salvador's ARENA government, headed by President Alfredo Cristiani, passed the 1993 Amnesty Law that precluded accountability for war crimes. Since then, consistent efforts to bring the past back into the public domain have been rare and limited to the work by El Salvador's human rights organizations (though see Binford, this volume, which discusses efforts to incorporate historical memory of the war into tourism and museums in the northeastern department of Morazán). The country's two major political parties, ARENA and FMLN, which represent the war's opposing sides, have not facilitated a public discussion that might provide a forum for reconciliation. Only during electoral periods have ARENA and FMLN publicly addressed the war's causes. Their explanations, however, have been stereotypical and caricatured.

Not only has the absence of a public discussion about the civil war precluded retributive and restorative justice, but some would argue that it has also allowed the government to avoid tackling the socioeconomic problems at the root of the war. The Peace Accords focused on demilitarization. They only secondarily addressed economic reform. Indeed, as the Peace Accords explicitly assert, "The general philosophy or orientation of the Government's economic policy, which FMLN does not necessarily share, is not covered by this Agreement" (United Nations 1992, 31). In emphasizing the dissolution of military rule, the accords implicitly defined democracy narrowly. In short, the democracy laid out by the Peace Accords was procedural, defined chiefly by civil and political citizenship entitlements. The ARENA governments adopted a neoliberal agenda, along with the rest of Central America at the cusp of the new millennium, as many chapters in this volume demonstrate; these parallel transformations that blended political and economic freedoms yielded a "free-market democracy" (see Moodie 2010, 41–45; Binford, this volume).

My focus in this chapter is on what an election can tell us about aspects of Salvadoran politics that are often invisible in everyday life (much as Raventós's account of the Costa Rican referendum in this volume reveals about that country's politics). In El Salvador, memories and experiences of the war usually delineate basic party constituencies in such a way that postwar elections represent expressions of historical divisions and conflicts that do not manifest in other circumstances (see R. Montoya, this volume, for an account of how

symbolic uses of recent history have mobilized Sandinista performance in Nicaragua). Even so, the victory of the FMLN in the 2009 presidential elections has to be explained. Mauricio Funes, the FMLN candidate, was able to temper the wartime divide while addressing long overlooked socio-economic problems of ordinary people.

Postwar Elections as War

Both FMLN and ARENA have basic constituencies rooted in wartime and maintained through the postwar reproduction of a historical divide. In Santiago, in the 2009 elections, party allegiances in a *cantón* (territory within a municipal unit) were predicated upon war experiences and family ties. The central barrios and northern cantón Las Ánimas, where the population was repressed during the war, massively supported the FMLN. The remaining northern cantones, where people had joined paramilitary groups, clearly supported ARENA. Party allegiance echoed throughout the landscape with murals, flags, and candidate portraits. Housefronts, entrance doors, lampposts, the pavement, and even trees were decorated either in the red of the FMLN or the blue-white-red of ARENA. Just as Salvadorans supported FMLN or ARENA on the basis of their wartime experiences, the parties' leaderships devised electoral strategies that resonated with war tactics. These include a fixation with territorial control; death threats, confrontations and physical aggressions perpetrated on the basis of party allegiances; secrecy and rumor about spies; and a denial of neutrality, ambiguity, and middle positions.

Territory was critical in all parties' strategizing. Both FMLN and ARENA were structured locally around a hierarchical leadership that was decentralized via the establishment of support groups or leaders in barrios and cantones. This structure already existed in areas where the parties enjoyed large basic constituencies but had to be created anew for the 2009 elections in others. While the FMLN sought to found "base committees" in each sector, ARENA identified specific leaders supportive of its party who would manage to attract other residents. In both party's meetings, discussions revolved around the barrios and cantones that each party controlled, where FMLN base committees or ARENA leaders were located, and what strategies should be devised vis-à-vis those in control of the opposing party. The dispute over territory became evident in the competition between parties to cover streets, houses, and roads with their colors; often one party's contingent painted and plastered a street or road during the day, only to have members of the opposing party paint or plaster over their work that night. In previous elections, FMLN and ARENA loyalists had clashed in the same way (*La Prensa Gráfica* 1999).³



Figure 2.1. Salvadoran Election Poster, 2009, Ainhoa Montoya

Physical aggression was not absent during 2009. Several FMLN members told me that as they were trying to found a base committee for the first time in the northern cantón San Antonio Arriba in September 2007, three hooded men attacked their leader. Other neighbors who showed an interest in the FMLN received death threats. FMLN members were confident that these were ARENA attacks. One explained, “The two San Antonios, Arriba and Abajo, and Santa Cruz Loma are all *areneros* (ARENA loyalists), so it is dangerous for us to set foot there dressed in our red T-shirts. Until 2007, the FMLN leadership had not tried to visit these cantones during the electoral campaigns. It was there that the Comandos Chéncho Beltrán (death squads) were active during the war.”⁴

During FMLN meetings, rumors constantly circulated about the persecution or assassination of party members. At one such gathering, a police officer who had befriended members of the local FMLN leadership told them that news had arrived at his sub-delegation about cars and taxis that had been seen driving around the department of La Libertad without license plates and whose drivers had been hired to assassinate FMLN members. He provided details of the colors and designs of the reported vehicles so that people could watch out for themselves. In the face of this kind of threat, bolstered by the feelings of insecurity stemming from the homicidal violence that makes the

daily news in postwar El Salvador, FMLN members either walked home in groups after meetings or, more often, dropped each other off in pick-up trucks. Several FMLN loyalists confessed to me their fear of participating in political activity during elections.

Secrecy also characterized both the 2009 electoral campaign and wartime. Both ARENA and FMLN leaders were suspicious of people they did not know or trust who attended meetings. They became fixated on the possibility that the opposing party was infiltrating their meetings, or that someone from within their own leadership was disclosing information about electoral strategies. This distrust was not groundless, since all parties gathered intelligence, partly on the basis of rumor but also based on the information provided by the members sent to the meetings of the opposing party. Even with their own relatives, party loyalists tended to remain secretive about electoral strategies; the same occurred during the war, when, as some women told me, their own husbands would not share information concerning political and military activity.

No one conceived of neutrality as a possibility. Santiagueños often knew their neighbors' and relatives' allegiances or thought they could guess them. Even I was sometimes viewed with suspicion. The ARENA leadership assumed that I sided with the FMLN because my host family supported this party. The family's house was decorated with a poster of Funes and an FMLN flag, visible from the street, hung from a tall mango tree in the backyard. Several times I was publicly accused in ARENA meetings of having been sent by the Venezuelan and Cuban governments in order to gather information. Nor was I free from suspicion from the FMLN leadership, given my scrupulous silence about what I had heard at ARENA meetings. I thus had to repeatedly justify why I was interested in the elections. I was as open as possible about my attendance at the public meetings of all parties, and I avoided leadership meetings to which I had been invited so as not to raise suspicions.

On more than one occasion I was chided by friends who supported the FMLN for interacting with a member of an ARENA-affiliated family. This happened when I was returning from an event at the Jesuit Central American University (UCA) in San Salvador in a microbus crammed with university students. I spent the journey chatting with two 20-year-old girls who had seen me in Santiago and were curious about what I was doing there, since that municipio is rarely visited by foreigners. A friend accompanying me, an FMLN loyalist, remained silent during the journey. When we got off in Santiago, he explained the two girls were from ARENA families and admonished me for having told them details about myself.

An examination of political parties' strategizing during the 2009 electoral campaigns shows not only the continuing salience of wartime divisions, but also the extent to which FMLN and ARENA were apparently mirror images

of one another. Looking solely at the symbolic and performative elements of electoral competition, one could infer that El Salvador's postwar elections had become a struggle unto themselves, in which both sides mimicked the other while the motivation at the root of conflict had dissipated. During the war, both ARENA and FMLN were arguably the products of a fusion of political and military elements. The FMLN structured itself as an army yet originated in mass political organizations. ARENA publicly presented itself as being protected by its own army (Martín-Baró 1991, 298). In addition, ARENA has been linked to wartime death squads (United Nations 1993, 184-86). Obviously the two parties differed radically in ideology. Tracing the genealogy and ideological underpinnings of the two main political parties in the country's postwar era can thus shed light on the frictions between their basic constituencies.

The FMLN, born in 1980 as a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla organization, united the five main revolutionary political-military groups of the 1970s in an effort to wage a "final offensive" against the Salvadoran state in 1981 that turned out to be merely one of the events precipitating the country's twelve-year civil war. The FMLN converted to a legal political party with the 1992 Peace Accords. Its supporters largely comprise ex-guerrillas as well as members of social movements and popular organizations. Since its transformation, the FMLN has become ARENA's main electoral rival.

ARENA was founded in 1981 and gained the presidency in 1989. A nationalist, anti-communist and pro-capitalist party, ARENA responded to the interests of the fraction of the elite dissatisfied with the reformist Christian Democratic Party (PDC)-led junta erected in 1979, especially its implementation of agrarian reform (Martín-Baró 1991). After the war, it expanded its original agro-financial constituency into rural areas where paramilitary groups had been active or where it successfully developed patron-client relationships. While ARENA has promoted neoliberal economic measures conducive to consolidating accumulation by the country's elite, the FMLN, as stated in its charter, originally aimed to transform the status quo radically via the establishment of a socialist state (see FMLN 2006). In practice, however, internecine divisions between orthodox and reformist wings have dissipated the party's goals.

Given the war re-enactment and attendant emotions that so pervaded the 2009 elections, Salvadorans' party loyalties and electoral participation were chiefly motivated by their war positionality and experience. During 2009, many young people participated in both parties' campaigns in Santiago. In general, they joined the parties to which their elder kin were loyal. They readily embraced the party symbols and outward signs. Still, ideologies were relevant, though reformulated to the present-day conjuncture. FMLN leaders have continued to issue systemic and class-based explanations for Salva-

dorans' economic predicaments. Yet, in their 2009 program, both local and national FMLN leadership conspicuously avoided addressing questions of socialism, strategically distancing the party from its guerrilla face. By contrast, ARENA leaders disseminated a fierce anti-communism, predicated upon the alleged risk that the FMLN would establish a totalitarian regime like those of Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba.

The Politics of Fear and Memory: The Wartime Divide Updated

A “campaign of fear” orchestrated by ARENA and waged via mass media characterized the 2004 presidential elections (García Dueñas 2006; Wolf 2009, 447–54). This campaign was rooted in two threatening scenarios that ARENA claimed would materialize if the FMLN won: first, the consolidation of a communist regime, and, second, the enactment by the United States government of a policy prohibiting Salvadorans in the United States from sending remittances to El Salvador (García Dueñas 2006). The invoking of a communist threat was hardly new; this strategy had been widely deployed by the Salvadoran governments during the pre-war and war years—when El Salvador became a Cold War battleground—to legitimize counterinsurgency violence that often targeted civilians (see Binford 1996). Recourse to “the communist threat” can be traced all the way back to El Salvador’s 1932 peasant rebellion, which the government blamed on the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), and the army’s ensuing repression of 10,000 peasants (Alvarenga 2006; Anderson 1971; Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2008; López Bernal 2007). In the 2004 elections the communist threat was updated to coincide with ordinary Salvadorans’ present-day concerns, such as remittances, while maintaining long-lived imageries. This conflation of calculative and affective elements in a politics of fear also characterized the 2009 presidential elections.

ARENA leaders’ use of the term “communism” is vague enough to encompass anyone and anything that threatens the country’s status quo and elite interests (Martín-Baró 1991, 296). During the 2004 and 2009 campaigns, ARENA’s anti-communist rhetoric insinuated that the FMLN sought to establish a totalitarian and military state in the event of a victory in the presidential elections. The effectiveness of this rhetoric on the rural population was evident in the visits that I paid to FMLN constituents to the cantones in Santiago during the 2009 electoral campaign. Especially where residents had participated in paramilitary groups during the war, people were often quite hostile to visitors from the former guerrilla party. A barefoot woman in her 70s who received the FMLN leaders at the entrance of her adobe house in San Antonio Abajo did not want to hear their explanations about their party’s

electoral program. She declared emphatically that she knew what the FMLN would do if they won:

I have heard that we will be given a single dress and a single pair of shoes. And it doesn't matter if they are not our size because we won't be given any more of them. I am poor but I do have a few dresses. I also have my own house, and I know that I will have to share it with another family if they win. I also know what they intend to do with the old people, just because we are no longer able to work like the young people. And the coupons—we will be rationed and given weapons as during the war. What can you expect of the people who destroyed the country during the war?

This woman's statement exemplifies how the symbolic and discursive strategies of ARENA leaders percolated through to ordinary Salvadorans and alienated them from the FMLN.

The hostility against FMLN constituents and manifest fear of communism prevalent in areas of northern Santiago stemmed partly from ARENA's deployment of Cold War rhetoric at public meetings during the campaign. ARENA's public meetings, held Sundays, were attended mainly by men and women in their fifties and sixties, most of them peasants. Men wearing peasant hats and women in aprons predominated, their garb indicative of their humble origins. Every meeting began with ARENA's anthem, which everyone had to sing with his or her right fist raised so as to avoid accusations of being an FMLN spy or showing insufficient enthusiasm. The anthem expresses hostility against FMLN members: *El Salvador será la tumba donde los rojos terminarán* (El Salvador will be the grave where the reds [FMLN]—will end). Speeches by ARENA leaders then would describe how FMLN guerrillas had destroyed the country through attacks on pylons, bridges, and other infrastructure. These speeches also portrayed the FMLN as a present-day and future threat given the party's alleged alignment with Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro. As a local ARENA leader said at a weekly meeting:

Why is communism so interested in El Salvador? Because this is a country of development. ARENA supports agriculture, the church, sports ... ARENA is the party of peace, freedom and progress. We live in a democracy but let's make good use of this democracy. Let's give our children a free country like the one we have enjoyed. If we do not defend ourselves, we might be in great *danger*. The FMLN will hand over the country to Chávez. We should not make the same mistake as the Nicaraguans, who are now *slaves* of Venezuela and Cuba. These elections have to make history. We need to fight for a fifth ARENA government that allows for a perpetuation of freedom and democracy. You are the soldiers who must defend peace against the *threat* of international communism, which is the origin of the current economic crisis. ARENA promotes freedom, economic development, and

foreign investment. The FMLN only wants *war*. The change proclaimed by the FMLN is one of *war* and communism. (emphasis added)

ARENA's electoral strategy hinged upon a Manichaeian representation of postwar political life in which the FMLN epitomized threat, destruction, totalitarianism, economic collapse, and violence. By contrast, ARENA was depicted as righteous, involved in the reconstruction of postwar El Salvador, and a guarantor of freedom and democracy. Democracy, in the rhetoric of ARENA leaders, is the antithesis of communism; it allows the individual freedom to hold private property and undertake profit-driven economic activity.

In ARENA's depiction, political change was equivalent to an ostensible threat to all postwar achievements: democracy, freedom, and private property. For instance, in February 2009, following the closure of several maquilas in El Pedregal and the consequent loss of thousands of jobs, rumors spread that these changes had occurred in response to the prospect of an FMLN president. Indeed, during the electoral campaign, the threat of disinvestment in the event of an FMLN victory was consistently raised. ARENA leaders reminded Santiagueños that even if they were poor, the fact that they owned anything at all was a result of their own party's governance. According to ARENA rhetoric, their possessions might well be taken away by a communist FMLN government. Violence was thus legitimized and encouraged in the event of an FMLN victory.

This rhetoric cannot be considered a mere strategic ploy. On 26 October 2008, when I met with the fifteen men and one woman of the local ARENA leadership in Santiago to explain my interest in attending their meetings, some seemed genuinely concerned about the prospect of an FMLN victory. After I had described the details of my research and addressed their concerns, a man in his late 30s told me: "Everything you have explained to us seems reasonable to me, but you have to understand that our worries are not unfounded. Our country is under the threat of communism, so we cannot trust anyone right now."

The major mass media, mostly pro-ARENA, have played a fundamental role in drawing attention to the threat allegedly posed by the FMLN to the Salvadoran nation and eliciting fear. In the 2009 campaign, on El Salvador's television channels 2, 4, and 6 (all owned by the same ARENA-linked media mogul, Boris Esersky), daily advertisements asserted both the violent nature of the FMLN and the alliance between FMLN presidential candidate Mauricio Funes and the Venezuelan government—an alliance so strong that the country would be handed over to Hugo Chávez in the event of an FMLN victory. One of these TV ads suggested the following:

Mauricio Funes is a presidential candidate backed by the FMLN, a communist party and an ally of Hugo Chávez. Chávez is the number one *enemy* of the United States. The United States is an ally of El Salvador. Millions of

Salvadorans live there, send their remittances and thousands have benefited from the TPS.⁵ Therefore, if Funes and the FMLN take office we will be subjected to Chávez. Your remittances and the TPS are in *danger*. In *danger* are your freedom, your job, and prices will truly rise sky high. Risky? It is more than that. Funes and the FMLN are a *danger* for your pocketbook and a *real danger* for El Salvador. (emphasis added)

These advertisements were either anonymous or signed by the organization Fuerza Solidaria, heretofore unknown in El Salvador, which originated in Venezuela to delegitimize Chávez's government. Associations were made in these ads between the FMLN and the Venezuelan, Cuban, and Nicaraguan governments and even Islamist terrorism.⁶

On 13 December 2008 the newspaper *La Prensa Gráfica* reported that the Salvadoran Ministry of Defense was investigating the existence of armed groups in different parts of the country, mostly FMLN strongholds (2008). Concrete details were offered to lend credibility to the charges: "At the coordinates 13°59'07.7" North and 89°13'34.76" West is an area of military training, northeast of the Cinotepeque mountain, in the jurisdiction of El Paisnal, a zone under territorial and military control by the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) during the war" (*La Prensa Gráfica* 2008a). This news precipitated a widespread discussion in the country's mass media about the ties between these alleged armed groups and the FMLN. Photos of a commemoration held annually on 12 and 13 December in the municipio El Paisnal, in the San Salvador department, to pay homage to the deceased guerrilla Commander Dimas Rodríguez, were published by the media. In this commemoration ex-guerrillas simulated a military march dressed in uniform and carrying plastic or defunct rifles. The media and ARENA used the presence of FMLN members in the photos of this military march simulacrum as evidence that FMLN was arming and training new guerrilla groups.

"The FBI and Interpol could help us with the technical and scientific investigation." These were the words of the country's attorney general regarding the issue of armed groups. "We need to have scientific verification that the photographs are authentic in order to sustain a potential accusation" (*El Diario de Hoy* 2008). The insistence on the scientific nature of the investigation seemed to aim at depoliticizing the issue in the eyes of the Salvadoran public. According to the right-wing media, the investigation simply sought to verify the existence of organizations receiving paramilitary training with the goal of destabilizing the state. Although the ARENA government suggested that the gravity of the issue was such that it had to be reported to international organizations, after a few days of front-page coverage the issue was dropped (*La Prensa Gráfica* 2008b).

In Santiago, incidents in the municipio were interpreted in the light of this news. A relative of my host family recounted to me a rumor that had spread throughout the cantón San Sebastián Abajo, where she lived. According to

the rumor, guerrillas might well have been training in Santiago's mountainous cantones since residents had seen armed men not from the area. The mass media's coverage of the FMLN had thus managed to sow seeds of doubt about the nature of this party's political project.

In 2004 and 2009, ARENA resorted to a politics of fear and memory to counter its eroding hegemony—erosion rooted in the unfulfilled promises of the Peace Accords and aggravated by the impact of neoliberal economic policy. It also aimed to demonstrate the quality of the Salvadoran democracy to an international community less supportive of overt counterinsurgency violence than it had been during the 1980s, when the United States provided financial, military, and moral backing to the Salvadoran government. What is distinctive about the Salvadoran case is the prominence of Cold War rhetoric in the country's postwar electoral politics in an era when such rhetoric has waned from both international and Latin American politics. Although the left/right divide is still widely invoked in Latin America, it has become associated with new ideologies, such as Chávez's "twenty-first century socialism."

Aside from the performative aspects described in the above section, which largely reflect war experiences, ARENA's politics of fear also put emotions to work in specific ways (compare with Ahmed 2004). ARENA's free-floating signifier of "the communist" slid sideways among FMLN guerrillas, the Cuban, Venezuelan, and Nicaraguan regimes, and Islamist terrorists. The country's right-wing media and ARENA leadership also deployed historical and contemporary associations of "threat," "danger," "war," and "terrorism" that increased the affective value of the communist threat. Those signs in circulation during elections became commonplace currency for Salvadorans across the political spectrum. El Salvador's 2009 elections constituted one of the few occasions on which Salvadorans publicly aired wartime frictions; yet discussion was limited by campaign rhetoric and political ideologies. Of course, war memories were not elicited to promote dialogue, but rather to evoke fear, exacerbate hostilities, and gain electoral advantage. During the 2004 and 2009 elections, discussion about the parties' economic agendas was eclipsed by the politics of fear that was at work. The heightened animosities, largely stemming from ARENA's politics of fear, stimulated the vote of many disaffected Salvadorans in both 2004 and 2009.

Building a Middle

If the re-enactment of war and ARENA's politics of fear explain the doubling of voter turnout in 2004 and again in 2009, what was different about the 2009 presidential elections that allowed for the FMLN victory? The 2009 results cannot be fully understood from within the paradigm of a rigid national

political divide. During the 2009 campaign, Mauricio Funes, the FMLN presidential candidate, addressed the economic and social concerns of ordinary Salvadorans, minimizing wartime political cleavages and appealing to Salvadorans across the political spectrum. Indeed, Funes had not militated in the FMLN until his candidacy. A charismatic left-wing journalist and human rights advocate, Funes was well known for the Salvadoran TV news programs he hosted for more than twenty years. From the moment his candidacy was announced in 2007 he stressed both symbolically and literally the distinction between him and the party. He tried to maintain a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the party. Funes never appeared in public dressed in the FMLN's red color or raised his left fist and sang the party anthem at political rallies.

In contrast to the FMLN's ubiquitous identification with the Venezuelan and Cuban governments, Funes repeatedly declared his predilection for Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's governance style and for Brazilian-style participatory democracy. Like Lula, he sought to continue neoliberal policies while developing a social agenda to lessen the impact of these policies on the poor. In a speech delivered during a visit to Santiago on 10 March 2009, Funes stressed his commitment to stabilizing the prices of basic goods, generating jobs, facilitating access to and improvement of basic utilities such as running water, expanding the pension and health care systems, and providing credit and assistance to those working the land as well as social housing and other subsidies for poor families. All of these were concerns for largely rural municipios like Santiago.

In a further attempt to distance Funes from the FMLN, the association *Amigos de Mauricio* was founded. This association, which included former right-wing advocates and high-ranking ex-military officials, attempted to build up the virtually nonexistent middle in the Salvadoran political spectrum. In Santiago, a former military official belonging to this association accompanied the FMLN departmental deputy Gerson Martínez on his tour of the La Paz Department municipios. In every stop, the former military official explained to audiences that he had fought with the army during the war but that he was supporting the FMLN in 2009 because ARENA had failed to generate economic prosperity. He denied that the military was unanimously supporting ARENA, even though that party's leaders had tried to demonstrate so by marching with members of El Salvador's Veterans Association "General Manuel José Arce" (ASVEM) on San Salvador streets on 7 September 2008, the day of ASVEM's fifth anniversary.

ARENA maintained that Funes's distinction from FMLN was a rhetorical ploy. Ultimately, ARENA claimed, Funes remained firmly allied with the FMLN and Hugo Chávez. While ARENA simply denied the possibility of a middle position, the FMLN managed it in a contradictory fashion. The public endorsement of Funes by former military officials during the campaign

benefited the FMLN insofar as it demonstrated that sectors traditionally opposed to the party now supported it. But the FMLN leadership, dominated by the orthodox wing of the party, consistently sought to minimize the distance that Funes had established between himself and the party. In this sense, both ARENA and the FMLN contributed to the increasingly polarized physiognomy of the Salvadoran political spectrum.

The immutability of the divide in the 2009 elections was thus more an *effect* of ARENA's and FMLN's mimicked reproduction of the divide than an *actual feature* of it. This was evidenced by the FMLN victory in the 2009 elections, which many observers believe reflected among other things Funes's successful building of a middle position, despite both parties' efforts to deny or co-opt this possibility. Indeed, on my visits with FMLN members to the northern rural areas of Santiago, where the population is predominantly right-wing, I encountered middle-aged men and women who declared, "I am giving my vote to Funes but not to the FMLN." Some went on to explain that while they did not trust the FMLN, they would vote for Funes, who seemed like a decent man, owing to the country's dire economic situation. I would thus argue that Funes received massive support from the electorate by transcending the Cold War divide re-enacted by ARENA and FMLN. Instead, he proposed concrete programs to address the pressing social and economic problems that had been sidestepped by the Peace Accords and eclipsed by ARENA's politics of fear. In so doing, he promised to satisfy ordinary Salvadorans' aspirations to an expanded vision of democracy.

Conclusion

El Salvador's 2009 presidential elections foregrounded the persistence of war legacies and conflicts, expressed in anachronistic Cold War imageries and rhetoric. These legacies were mobilized by political elites anxious to maintain their privilege through the promotion of neoliberal policies. Yet these legacies persist in Salvadorans' everyday relationships and lives partly because there has been no public discussion of the war beyond political strategizing or that recognizes the ambiguities of the wartime divide and its attached moralities. The resuscitation of wartime confrontations during the 2009 campaign allowed ARENA to avoid a public discussion of pressing economic issues and counter the erosion of the party's hegemony.

Funes's middle position was crucial in determining the FMLN victory in 2009. His charisma, along with his non-participation in the country's civil war (and the massively funded FMLN campaign) allowed for a revaluation, even by disaffected and disillusioned Salvadorans, of the belligerent image of the FMLN. This revaluation was also made possible by Funes's direct address

of the social and economic problems that had been consistently overlooked through the consolidation of a “free-market democracy.”

Notes

* I thank the editors of this volume, Ellen Moodie and Jennifer Burrell, as well as John Gledhill, Stef Jansen, Petra Kalshoven, and David Pretel for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter. Research for this chapter was funded by the University of Manchester and the Fundación Caja Madrid.

1. The PCN was the military’s official party since its founding in 1961. Elections were then observed by El Salvador’s military governments as a means to gain legitimacy but were also manipulated when necessary, as in 1972 and 1977 (Stanley 1996). After the 1979 coup d’état, the PCN became a minority party. It was recently disbanded (2011) because it had not garnered enough votes.
2. For a critical view on Truth Commissions, see Laplante and Theidon (2007) and Wilson (2001).
3. The most notable case of inter-party violence occurred during the 2004 presidential elections, when two ARENA members were killed while mounting party propaganda (*La Prensa Gráfica* 2004).
4. Chéncho Beltrán was well known in Santiago for having led a local death squad and orchestrated numerous assassinations during the early 1980s, until his group was attacked by guerrillas in 1985.
5. The Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program that grants legal residency in the United States to 260,000 Salvadorans was revived by the U.S. government in March 2001, after the two earthquakes that devastated El Salvador, and has since been successively extended (PNUD 2005). Yet the TPS creates a sort of “legal limbo,” given that those benefiting from it cannot leave the United States and live with the uncertainty that stems from not receiving a resolution to their status (PNUD 2005, 432–33). Its temporary nature explains why ARENA has deployed the rescission of TPS as a threat during presidential elections.
6. See, for instance, the documentaries “Hugo Chávez: Una amenaza real” and “No entreguemos El Salvador,” which are available at <http://fuerzasolidaria.org/?p=583> and <http://fuerzasolidaria.org/?p=723> (accessed 30 September 2011). These documentaries were shown on Salvadoran TV and at ARENA’s political rallies.