DEEP POLITICS

Community Adaptations to Political Clientelism in Twenty-First-Century Mexico

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Abstract: *The specific contribution of this study is to explore how a communitarian lifeworld prepares the ground for practices of political clientelism without requiring the "foundational favor" noted in other contexts. Based on the encounter between ethnographies from two different communities of the Mesoamerican tradition in Mexico, the article argues that this lifeworld is forged by the habitual ways in which most collective tasks are carried out, that is, by forming and participating in networks. First, we offer a concrete description of the operation of two problem-solving networks of political clientelism in these communities. These networks are considered legitimate since they appear to be part of the communitarian practices. Second, we observe that the state often fails to reach out to the citizens with many social benefits, and we maintain that the problem-solving networks bridge the gap between the citizens and the state. Third, we argue that the ethnographic approach has been of paramount importance in reaching these findings, which are hardly attainable without this method. We consider that the workings of the clientelist networks represent a deep expression of people's communitarian lifeworlds.*

Political clientelism has attracted considerable attention in recent years among scholars dedicated to the study of democracy and elections in Latin America. While literature from the 1960s and 1970s tended to anticipate that economic development and political competition would do away with it (Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estévez 2007, 182, 203), recent texts caution that clientelism is more than a remainder of authoritarian regimes (Hilgers 2012, 12). Many authors document the considerable persistence of political clientelist practices in a number of different countries on the continent, while several also question the degree to which these practices are entirely antidemocratic (Gay 1999, 2006; Lazar 2004; Auyero, Lapegna, and Page 2009; Fox 2012).

The contribution of the present article is to explore clientelist practices in a communitarian context. We compare notes from separate ethnographic fieldwork in two local communities in Mexico: Íñigo González-Fuente in Xico, Veracruz, and Turid Hagene in San Lorenzo Acopilco, Mexico Federal District (DF). Dur-

ing our discussions, we were struck by the extent to which the lifeworld created through communitarian practices prepared the ground for the practices of political clientelism. We notice that explorations of communitarian practices and forms of organizing have been absent in earlier studies of political clientelism. We offer insight into the importance of this issue.

We also contribute ethnographies of the workings of two problem-solving networks engaged in political clientelism, one in each community. Our aim is more descriptive than normative. However, we do have some critical reflections on the fact that, in our experience and in that of many other researchers (Gay 1999, 2006; Lazar 2004; Auyero, Lapegna, and Page 2009; Fox 2012), some forms of political clientelism appear to represent a version of "poor people's politics" (Auyero 2001). This is what we term "deep politics," which seems to be in tune with the lifeworlds of many members of communities, and maybe with their interests in the short term.[1] We further highlight the ways in which the communitarian lifeworld takes reciprocity for granted, and that this bestows legitimacy on the activities of the clientelist networks and by and large renders coercion unnecessary.

Our writing strategy is to speak in terms of "we" when we aim to produce a common text on our findings; the ethnographies from each community, however, are rendered in terms of "I," since we carried out the fieldwork separately. Furthermore, our findings depend as much on the cumulative knowledge from both our studies as on comparison.

We do not argue that only communities experience political clientelism, but certainly the local societies that are communities do deploy practices, notions, and lifeworlds that facilitate the formation and reproduction of clientelist problem-solving networks. The goods and services obtained through these networks are reciprocated by votes and other electoral services, often mediated by a local operator, a person who enjoys considerable standing in the community, and thus is able to *jalar gente* ("pull" or mobilize people).

We appreciate that various communitarian institutions from the Mesoamerican tradition have survived by adaptation and negotiation through centuries of Spanish colonization and evangelization, liberal abolition of their right to own land collectively, and seventy years of authoritarian rule by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Now the communities are adapting to the multiparty game of democracy, where one still needs connections and support by those higher up in the social hierarchy in order to access public goods. The problem-solving networks facilitate such access. Political clientelism appears to bridge the gap between the state and the citizens, and maybe offers as much participation as the top-down participative institutions offered by the Mexican state, for instance in the Federal District.

We are conscious that our findings are not equally valid in the entire Mexican territory, where a variety of different clientelist practices are in operation. We do, however, consider that we can contribute toward filling part of the gap that

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1. The title "Deep Politics" reflects our recognition of Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's term *México profundo* (deep Mexico).

Auyero (2000, 74) pointed out concerning the lack of knowledge of the workings of problem-solving networks at the grassroots level.

Political Clientelism and Vote Buying

Political clientelism may be defined as a vertical relationship that is voluntary, reciprocal, face-to-face or broker-mediated, and possibly affective; it plays out over time, involving exchange of goods and services for political support, to mutual benefit (Roniger 1990, 2–4). The process takes place in networks of informal relationships that cut across social class (Adler-Lomnitz, Salazar, and Adler 2004, 26–29).

We do not have the space for a thorough ethnographic documentation of the difference between political clientelism and vote buying; however, we find it necessary to make a brief note on the distinction between these two practices. Like clientelism, vote buying concerns the exchange of goods and services for political support, but it is limited to one specific exchange; thus it does not give rise to personal and affective relationships. Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes (2004, 66) specify it as payment of "minor benefits (food, clothing, cash) to citizens in exchange for their votes." Hilgers (2011, 577–578) argues for keeping the two practices conceptually apart in order to aid theory building. Our findings highlight the legitimacy of political clientelism in the communities under study, whereas vote buying is considered illegitimate. We would misrepresent the actual notions at work in the communities under study if we did not spell this out.

The visibility of this distinction depends largely on the perspective we as researchers adopt. We could submit that, seen from the supply side or the perspective of the patron, these are all different ways to spend money in order to obtain votes (Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estévez 2007, 187). The practices may approximate a continuum, with clientelist networks on one extreme and vote buying as a onetime monetary transaction on the other. However, seen from the demand side, the clients' perspective, these practices are perceived as entirely different, above all when it comes to the issue of legitimacy. In our case communities, we noticed that the operation of political clientelism in all its stages went on visibly and openly, while the buying and selling of votes could never be observed, nor would anyone admit to having engaged in such a practice. This is not to say that nobody did it, but it was always spoken of as something that "others" would do, and something that you could accuse your adversary of, if he or she won the election. We never heard anyone being accused of clientelist practices, but vote buying was a standard accusation.

For instance in Acopilco, after the PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática) lost the election of delegation chief in 2012, a PRD militant accused the winner, a previous PRD politician who had changed party to the PRI, of vote buying: "One week before the elections Adrián distributed a lot of water tanks and money. . . . How cheaply the dignity of a people is sold!" She did not accuse him of clientelist

practices, which he was carrying out quite openly; and so was she, according to what she told me. While vote buying was an entirely pejorative expression, clientelism did not have any specific term in the communities; people spoke of "social work" or "helping each other." The distinction between the two practices emerged clearly from the discourse of informants on the demand side of political clientelism. The issue of perspective in research on political clientelism is paramount, as Auyero (1999) also submits.

The only context in which informants in the communities would admit that they might accept resources in exchange for their votes was in speaking of receiving gifts from all possible suppliers, then voting according to their own choice. This was seen by many as the typically "Mexican way," the smart and *mañoso* (trickster) way, or *tranza* (dishonest). For instance, a cleaning lady in Xico talked about the distribution of food supplies: "The government of Fox does help us," she said. "Fidel Herrera also."[2] The latest food supply she had received was from the mayor from the party Convergencia, because she was "remotely related" to him. She also felt grateful to the mayor for the materials destined for a new room in her house. The PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) gave her an umbrella and told her to vote for them. She recognized that all the parties had helped her, but she kept voting for the PRI.

Finally, we wish to make a brief comment on the issue of force and coercion in the clientelist literature. Several authors have emphasized this aspect in the Latin American and Mediterranean context (Scott 1977; Fox 1994; Schefner 2001; Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estévez 2007; Díaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2009; Szwarcberg 2011). Terms like "force," "coercion," "pressure," "threat," "fear," and "captive" are used frequently. Following Tosoni (2007, 51), however, we wish to point out that the exercise of force and coercion are not inherent qualities of the clientelist relationship. Tosoni differentiates domination enforced by physical threats and violence from clientelist domination, which originates from exchanges considered legitimate by its participants. The key feature here is legitimacy, which will figure prominently in our text.

Does Clientelism Still Exist?

Literature on this phenomenon in the 1960s and 1970s perceived political clientelism as "typical of underdeveloped political systems, usually at early phases of institutionalization, often under authoritarian or colonial regimes" (Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estévez 2007, 182). Accordingly, some scholars (Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estévez 2007, 203; Combes 2011, 28) predicted the disappearance of political clientelism in Mexico with the advent of multiparty competition at the national level, following the victory of the PAN in 2000. Despite attempts to document such a tendency (e.g., Díaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2009), most scholars agree that it still exists (Cornelius 2004; Tosoni 2007; Hilgers 2008, 2009,

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2. Fidel Herrera was governor of the state of Veracruz (2004–2010).

2011 and 2012; Fox and Haight 2009; González Hernández and González Hernández 2011; Hicken 2011).

Furthermore, we find that it represents an important means for less privileged citizens to influence not the social programs and the principles of distribution, but distribution itself. What is difficult to obtain through bureaucratic procedures is attainable for the price of a vote, and other electoral services. Thus multiparty competition, more than doing away with political clientelism, seems to have brought about its democratization (Gay 2006, 212). Certainly some scholars consider that clientelism undermines solidarity among peers (Foweraker 1990, 16; Schefner 2001, 596; Montambeault 2011, 95), whereas Lazar (2004, 228) suggests it may be understood as a form of citizenship practice. Fox (2012, 208), furthermore, argues that clientelism apparently persists; thus the question to be asked is rather "to what degree it interferes with citizens' exercise of their democratic rights."

We consider that there are three main factors that maintain and strengthen clientelist networks in today's Mexico: (1) the persistence of a profound socio-economic inequality between individuals and social groups, (2) the failure of public administration to reach out to the less privileged citizens, and (3) the existence of what we term a "communitarian lifeworld." The latter refers, among other things, to the ways in which community members customarily seek to carry out many different tasks by means of forming and participating in networks. Our study aims to explore the two latter factors.

A Methodological Note

Our fieldwork was carried out independently in two separate but similar projects. We used basically the same ethnographic approach, since we were both interested in capturing the political process as it was seen from the perspective of the clients (Auyero 2002, 40). Participant observation constituted our fundamental activity, which Bryman (2004, 291) terms "the extended involvement of the researcher in the social life of those he or she studies"; such immersion generates knowledge and insight (Schatz 2009, 14). Issues of moral universes, forms of rationality, legitimacy, and meanings can hardly be calculated or discovered by means of quantitative methods or even interviews, whereas participant observation by a skillful researcher makes this possible. Some of the information emerging from ethnographic fieldwork is of the kind that informants take for granted and that "goes without saying," which is hardly possible to obtain by any other method.

We lived in our respective communities during the fieldwork periods. This facilitated personal relationships with community members and permitted serendipity, an open-ended research attitude that provides access to "unsought findings" (Rivoal and Salazar 2013). In addition, we have relied on a multiple-methods approach (Bayard de Volo and Schatz 2004, 270), utilizing, to varying degrees, informal conversations, life stories and semistructured interviews, small soundings, and document analysis in archives, newspapers, and electoral statistics.

In Xico the fieldwork period lasted for ten months, from October 2005 to July 2006, thus including the campaign for the presidential election in July 2006. I used

to hang out with the *"esquineros,"* neighbors, mostly men, who spent hours on end at the corner next to the house where I was living. It was precisely through an esquinera that I found Luisa's restaurant and learned about her problem-solving network. After a few weeks I had my neighbor network, which constantly kept me informed about who the representatives of the parties were, where the meetings and the distribution of food supplies took place, and when the candidates were coming to hold their rallies. From then on I entered into deep immersion in the municipal center of Xico; I could frequent the meetings of various parties on a regular basis and interview key actors in local politics. All this allowed me to register the main clientelist networks used by the political parties in the municipal elections of 2005.

In Acopilco the fieldwork periods amounted to fifteen months over the years 2003–2012, which included three periods of electoral activity (2003, 2006, and 2012). I noticed that socioreligious practices mobilized large numbers of villagers on a continuous and highly visible scale. I started participating in these activities, which also made me a well-known figure among large numbers of villagers. I also took long morning walks, a pleasant way to get acquainted with other morning walkers, have informal conversations, get updates on the latest gossip, observe a variety of housing conditions, spot calls for meetings at the village *zócalo* (central square), experience the mass of stray dogs, witness the numerous religious shrines (*ermitas*), and see women queuing for water in the dry season.

My repeated stays made it possible to piece together fragments of information registered on different occasions concerning the problem-solving clientelist network described in this text. The fact that I had met the operator Juan in 2005, when he was campaigning for the commissariat in charge of the communal property, made me strike up a conversation with him when I saw him outside the polling station in the 2006 election; that was how I noticed his monitoring. Later, I was able to be present at the initiation of the new electoral cycle of the network in 2011 and finally attended its enjoyable *carnitas* party, with its monitoring function, on Election Day in 2012.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TWO COMMUNITIES

Xico, Veracruz

Xico is a semiurban municipality located on the skirts of Cofre del Perote (an extinct volcano), forming part of Coatepec, an important coffee-growing valley, twenty kilometers southeast of Xalapa, the capital of the state of Veracruz. The municipality occupies a surface of 179 square kilometers and consists of seventy-four localities, with a population of 35,188 (INEGI 2011). The town council is located in the municipal center of Xico and consists of a mayor, a trustee, and three aldermen.

The territory could be divided into three parts, according to geological characteristics, forms of land property, and predominant economic sector. The lower part contains the municipal center, where I carried out most of my ethnographic fieldwork, and several settlements of five hundred inhabitants or more, constitut-

ing 80 percent of the population. The intermediate part contains 12 percent of the population, distributed among innumerable separate communities. The upper part concentrates the so-called "*nuevos pueblos*" (new villages), a product of the Agrarian Reform in the 1930s and 1940s. Those who live here are members of the *ejidos* (common property).

The local socioeconomic structure is dominated by patrons who are primarily large cattle owners, self-denominated as "*gente de razón*" (rational people). This is an upper-class segment consisting of twelve families who own large coffee plantations or grazing land for cattle. They live on the main street in the municipal center and do not participate in the communitarian socioreligious organization, which here is called *mayordomía.* Furthermore, there is a group of middlemen, consisting of small and midsized proprietors, as well as people employed in formal jobs: professionals, public servants, and teachers. Most of these middlemen live close to the main street, just like the house where I lived. The everyday and familiar interaction between these groups hides an unregulated and asymmetric relationship of production that is deeply vertical (see Dehouve 2009, 21). There is no contractual interchange; rather, the predominant view is to consider the relationship as paternalism, in the form of the patron giving work to the less privileged.

The large majority of the population in Xico belongs to the lower socioeconomic stratum. They have informal jobs, "renting themselves out to work," or they "help" the middlemen and patrons in agriculture, construction, and commerce. They live in the upper parts of the municipal center, above the church, on the outskirts of the center, or in rural communities in small houses of stone and wood, which they obtain through different government programs. These less privileged neighbors participate, often together with the intermediaries, in different communitarian practices such as celebrations that belong to the Catholic ritual calendar, for instance, processions or manufacturing of the floral arches.

Acopilco, Distrito Federal

Acopilco is a semirural *pueblo originario* (village with Mesoamerican roots) situated in the Federal District, Delegation of Cuajimalpa, bordering on the state of Mexico. Acopilco owns communal property of 16.08 square kilometers, which together with 1.27 square kilometers of small private property constitutes its entire territory; 14 square kilometers of the communal property (*bienes comunales*) is forest, and the population of twenty-four thousand (INEGI 2010) lives on the remaining area.

The municipalities in the Federal District were suppressed in 1929 (Serrano 2001), and no local figure is elected in the constitutional elections at the village level. However, from 1997 the population has participated in elections of a government chief in the Federal District, a member of the local Legislative Assembly (ALDF), and, from 2000, a delegation chief for Cuajimalpa.

Acopilco is one of two hundred pueblos originarios in the Federal District (Correa 2010); these feature a series of social, religious, political, and cultural practices that distinguish them from the rest of the city. These villages have communitarian

organizations, a civic-religious cargo system, a Catholic festive calendar including the celebration of the patron saint (*fiesta patronal*), defense of their territory and natural resources, a communitarian cemetery, collective memory, and networks of symbolic interchange (*mandas*) with other communities (Hagene 2007; Medina 2009; Romero 2009).

The original families and their descendants call themselves "natives," whereas those who have in-migrated more recently from other states and from downtown Mexico City are called *avecindados.* For the most part, only the natives participate in the communitarian practices, and the 2,345 *comuneros*—people with agrarian rights according to the official agrarian census—are all natives. The comuneros have their own commissariat to oversee the communal property; members are elected every three years in an assembly. The election itself, however, is carried out using ballot boxes similar to those used in the constitutional elections.

Nowadays only about one hundred people have income from primary activities, and fewer than one-third, mostly construction workers, have income from the secondary sector. Over two-thirds work in the tertiary sector, in commerce, transport, education, different kinds of services (professional, government, and domestic), and restaurants (SIDESO 2003). More than half the population have an income of less than twice the minimum wage, while fewer than half earn incomes equivalent to between two and nine times the minimum wage; 3 percent have an income of more than ten times the minimum wage. The majority of the population is among the poorer segments, but the social hierarchy is not as visible as in Xico, since the lower segments generally do not work for wealthy or landowning families in the community. Most people work outside the village, frequently downtown.

The population has been growing fast in the last decades, as is the case for most peripheral areas of the Federal District (Aguilar 2008). In only the past twelve years the number of registered voters has grown from ten thousand to seventeen thousand, mostly due to in-migration (IEDF 2000, 2012).

Forging a Communitarian Lifeworld

We present two local societies that first and foremost have in common that their members share a communitarian lifeworld. The lifeworld is the domain of everyday social existence and practical activity, understood as that which we take for granted and which possesses the naturalness of "things as they are" (Hagene 2010, 219). One aspect of the community lifeworld, of particular interest in this study, is the way in which the community's tasks are solved by means of networks. People participate throughout their lives in networks dedicated to religious organization (*fiscalías*/mayordomías), assemblies, collective work (*faena*), fictive family relations (*compadrazgo*), agrarian organizations (bienes comunales/ejido), or socioreligious practices embedded in the Catholic festive cycle.[3] In the following we render one example from each community in the socioreligious

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3. Fiscalías and mayordomías are communitarian religious institutions dating from colonial times in Mexico, the first in charge of the church, the second responsible for specific celebrations.

sphere: the Catholic celebration of San José in March 2006 in Xico, and the main patron saint festival in March 2005 in Acopilco. Every celebration features its own selection and combination of ritual elements, which serve to reproduce the communitarian identity and lifeworld.

The fiesta of San José includes processions, communitarian meals, and manufacturing of a floral arch. The latter is a characteristic ingredient of the most outstanding celebrations in the municipal center of Xico. A fabricated wooden arch, to which flowers are fixed, surrounds the entrance to the church. We include this practice to show the way in which the communitarian work is done: the organization of social and religious activities associated with the elaboration of the arch is carried out by using networks. Specifically, the *mayordomo*, elected every three years by the members of the community, is responsible for organizing all activities around the manufacturing of the floral arch. Many times throughout the year, a large number of the mayordomo's relatives and friends participate collectively in the "fetching of the lianas" that serve to fix the flowers to the wooden structure, the "gathering of the flowers," and the "hoisting of the arch." The tasks are assigned according to gender: the men carry out the rough work and coordinate the activities, while the women are in charge of the cooking, adornments, cleaning, and so on.

The fiesta's highlight is March 19, the day of San José. Fifty or more men carry the arch in a procession to the church and take turns in hoisting the arch to frame the church entrance; meanwhile, the women prepare the communitarian meal that is offered afterward. Both the procession and the meal are accompanied by music played by a brass band, dances, and rockets. The networks created by manufacturing the arch and associated activities constitute the base for the maintenance and strengthening of other types of networks, including those of political clientelism. This is what the person in charge of the manufacturing in 2006 told me: "The arch first and foremost unifies people; you share with new people, make friends, and strengthen the relationships you already have." Moreover, I have observed many times how the people who "pull" people (jalar gente) to go and fetch the flowers in the woods can also "pull" people in order to support a candidate.

In Acopilco, the two patron saint festivals (in March and August) require continuous labor to collect resources and to purchase or rent, produce and prepare, and organize and realize the various elements necessary for the celebrations. The main fiesta is organized by the *fiscales* in collaboration with the Grupo Pro-Fiesta.[4] It celebrates El Padre Jesús and takes place in March, starting on a Friday, with a seven-hour-long procession that meanders through the entire territory of the village. The participants carry sugarcane, freshly cut by networks of families who travel several hours and work the whole day cutting and loading the cane onto their trucks. Every year the same families are in charge of fetching the cane, though new participants may join.

At the end of the open-air mass on Sunday, the three couples of fiscales invite the entire community present to eat at their houses, normally in a patio, terrace,

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4. Grupo Pro-Fiesta is a union of what used to be ten different groups and networks in charge of diverse aspects of the fiesta.

or garden. Each couple is prepared to feed some two to three hundred people with *mole* or carnitas, the traditional ritual food, accompanied by soda, beer, and tequila. This element in the ritual repertoire is replicated by political operators of clientelist networks. It is a prestigious task to be a fiscal, and if the collected funds are not sufficient, some couples might end up taking out loans to cover these costs. Communion and reciprocity are realized on this ritual occasion.

In both communities all the expenses of the church and chapels and the celebrations of the ceremonial cycle are covered by the weekly collection of contributions from the villagers. For the church, the fiscales in Acopilco and the mayordomos in Xico do this job, and for the other celebrations, various committees carry them out. The villagers take turns to be in charge of these tasks, normally for one year at a time. Thus reciprocity consists in taking turns and contributing economically, while the practice forges networks adapted to the task and the territory it covers. Since this is the form of carrying out most of the communitarian tasks mentioned above, most villagers experience relationships with a number of other villagers, and over time, in different roles.

Many of these ceremonial activities generate a ritual language (Romero 2009, 59; see also Dehouve 2009), internalized by the community members. Many of these elements are used in family celebrations and, what is more interesting, these elements are activated also in practices of political clientelism. In comparison, Szwarcberg (2012, 234) emphasizes the way in which nonpolitical social networks subsequently serve in the context of political clientelism. Her case, however, is not that of a community with Mesoamerican roots but concerns a poor neighborhood in Buenos Aires, where potential brokers build a following by offering favors like babysitting, money lending, and counseling.

In both communities under study here, the procedure is the same in whatever activity there is to carry out, be it to mobilize people to construct and decorate an altar, pick coffee, attend political meetings, or vote: one operator passes the word and his or her people show up. This way of operating through networks is not simply an organizational pyramid, as we see it, but a deep expression of the communitarian lifeworld manifested through the ritual language.

WORKINGS OF THE CLIENTELIST NETWORKS

Political Clientelism in Xico, 2006

In 2006, when Felipe Calderón finally won the presidential elections, in Xico politics was centered on the recent municipal elections of 2005 and the positioning of the various groups regarding the "assault" on the municipal presidency in 2007. So even though my research took place during the electoral campaign for the presidential elections on July 2, 2006, the major part of my ethnographic material concerns past and future municipal elections, which were considered most contested in the population under study. Against this background I describe the functioning of one clientelist network that participated in the municipal campaign in 2005. I emphasize particularly how the network shares some significant features of the communitarian lifeworld: it is oriented to long-term relationships

(including intense periods during election times), to coexist with other social and religious networks, and to allow individuals to claim access to a variety of different resources (Adler-Lomnitz 1994, 76–77; Portes 1998, 3).

A Problem-Solving Network of Women

The network stands out because it consists mostly of women from the lower socioeconomic stratum. Among all the women, Luisa is the broker, the person in charge of motivating people (jalar gente) to participate in the network. On this occasion the network is promoting the Partido Revolucionario Veracruzano (PRV), although at other times Luisa collaborates with other parties or candidates.

I met Luisa the day that Victoria, a neighbor with whom I shared the corner next to my house, invited me to eat at Luisa's restaurant. (Luisa combined the running of the restaurant with her job as a teacher in Xico.) Victoria was a remote relative of Luisa's, and she insisted I had to meet her, since she had been *regidora* (alderman) in the municipality of Xico until a few weeks earlier. On this occasion Luisa could not attend to us because she had urgent business in the nearby municipality of Coatepec; she was helping a lady to resolve some transactions with the notary concerning an inheritance.

The next day, Luisa explained how yesterday's occurrence was an everyday activity for her. She told me that she does everything possible to help people resolve issues with the local administration (applications for public benefits, documents concerning inheritance, etc.). When she gets money from a candidate in an election campaign, she obtains all kinds of gifts for those who need them, and her husband sometimes calls her the "local charity." For years she has worked like this, with the result that a network of middle-aged women has formed around her, looking for help with their dealings with the bureaucracy and trusting her advice at the moment of casting their votes.

Luisa belongs to a series of organizations connected with the PRI; she defines herself as a woman who is sought out by the candidates because she "pulls people." When the candidates "invite you, they offer you positions," she tells me. During election times, she carries out *auténticas campañas de altura* (authentic high-quality campaigns): she walks the village house by house, including those of the opposition, telling people about the program of the candidate she supports, and many people follow her. With the money she gets from the candidates, Luisa offers medicine, food supplies, and clothes to the neighbors.

Luisa explains to me how the distribution of gifts among the neighbors takes place: a number of people are selected from the electoral register who are considered hard-core PRI-followers (*priístas de hueso colorado*), and they are the ones who are encouraged with gifts so that they will be motivated to mobilize and convince their families and friends.

Luisa's network became especially important in 2005 after the PRI split into two parties, the PRI and the PRV. The first was dominated by the "teachers' group" and the second by a group of large landowners. The PRV was created by the PRI in Veracruz expressly in order to keep control of all the groups that could not be accommodated in the PRI lists. Then, once the elections were over, there

would be governing pacts between the two parties in order to obtain an absolute majority and govern together. As an example, in the municipal elections of 2005 Luisa was invited to run for office with David of the Convergencia Party, but she excused herself, saying "I am priísta." Also the PRI group of teachers invited her, but finally she was included in the list of candidates for regidores (aldermen) of the PRV due to her "friendship" with the candidate Marcos, and because the PRV promised a job for her son in the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE). From her point of view, politics is "business," and people like her "participate in order to get some economic benefit."

The financing of Marcos's candidacy was taken care of by one of the richest families in Xico. For many years this family had unsuccessfully tried to win the municipal presidency. On this occasion, they chose to support Marcos as candidate, since he was popular among the neighbors. During the 2005 campaign, Luisa commented that her group invited the entire population equally: "We went to all the houses, including the remote settlements, and those of the opposition; I don't look at acronyms", said Luisa, "We gave live animals, goats and chickens, and we slaughtered a pig" to share between the neighbors at a party (*convivio*).

Luisa's network is a structure in which asymmetrical relationships are consolidated on the basis of the different amounts and types of the resources that can be attained in the exchange (Adler-Lomnitz 1994, 102; Portes 1998, 4). Luisa aspires to acquire stable employment for her son; at the same time, the women in her network gain access to small rewards both during the campaign and afterward. In addition, they understand that when she joins the Xico government team, Luisa will help them obtain access to public programs of social help faster.

In fact, Luisa obtained the position of third alderman for the PRV in the municipal elections in 2005, although after a few months her fellow party members forced her out because she refused their order to give half her alderman's salary to the municipal president Marcos. Although she denounced the "theft" of her position, Luisa would feel content if "they give a job to my son in exchange for the aldermanship."

Of course, Luisa resented losing her position, because "the women who follow" her have a lot of trust in her: "You will help us, Luisa; you will build our houses," referring to the facility with which they would access the municipal programs of construction or improvement of houses if Luisa stayed on in the municipal government team. As Auyero (1999, 309) suggests, these exchanges are not explicitly negotiated, but they are "part of the stock of practical knowledge." At any rate, these women encouraged her to keep fighting for her aldermanship, arguing that "they should give you something." The women considered legitimate both Luisa's claim and their own preferential access to social programs in exchange for giving support to a candidate. Finally, Luisa believed that it was perfectly legitimate to claim a job for her son in exchange for her time in the party. To this effect she wrote a letter directly to the governor, Fidel Herrera, asking him to "do her the favor of finding a good job for her son, after all these years of work in favor of the party."

Luisa's network is a network of political clientelism. Once Luisa receives financing from a candidate, it is put in motion with great intensity, agility, and determination among people who are previously united by a problem-solving

network and social practices such as participating in the same convivios. Luisa is a problem solver throughout the year, and she knows perfectly well how to capitalize on her network at election time.

From our perspective, the network's particular way of functioning has to do with what we have termed a communitarian lifeworld. Luisa and the women, as members of the same community, share the habit of constructing and maintaining lasting relationships that are formed around activities pertaining to the Catholic festive calendar. They share it because, as Portes (1998, 3) suggests, the individuals utilize the networks as a reliable source of benefits. In the Mexican context of socioeconomic inequality, Luisa and the women adapt their habits of reciprocal exchanges of resources to the political calendar, which possesses its own rituals in the form of campaigns and electoral appointments. In other words, their communitarian lifeworld articulates in a specific way with clientelistic practices, generating a structure that legitimizes the asymmetrical distribution of resources.

Political Clientelism in Acopilco, 2006

Over the years I have observed a series of practices in and around Acopilco which, taken together, present an outline of a social system where clientelism is taken for granted and perceived as legitimate among the clients, similar to what Auyero (2000, 75) observed in Argentina. In this subsection I explore a neighborhood-based problem-solving network from the end of one electoral cycle in July 2006, through the beginning of a new cycle in 2011, to its end on Election Day in 2012. It is deeply embedded in the actors' communitarian practices and lifeworlds, which seems to be what legitimizes the clientelist practices.

A Problem-Solving Network of Neighbors

On Election Day, July 2, 2006, I visited a series of polling stations in Acopilco. Outside one of them I struck up a conversation with a villager who was checking off people on a list. He told me that he had mobilized 130 votes, so he wanted to see if they actually turned up to vote. While we were talking, an elderly woman came out from the polling station; she spoke with him, he checked her name and asked how she had voted, upon which she told him, "*Todo amarillo!*" (all yellow), yellow being the color of the PRD. He did not seem in the least embarrassed to be "caught red-handed" monitoring people's votes. He volunteered that nobody had offered him a job in return for his electoral work, implying that this would have been normal. There was no need, he said, since he did this "out of passion." He told me that he helped people with paperwork and dealings with the authorities, and instead of asking for money, he asked them to vote for the PRD. I also observed people from other parties checking names off their lists; apparently this kind of mobilization and monitoring is seen as legitimate and does not require concealment or pretense. Voting for a certain party constitutes reciprocation for a received benefit; it obeys the communitarian norm of reciprocation, hence the legitimacy.

During a field visit in Acopilco in February–March 2011, I had the opportunity to observe how vote mobilizing may be initiated, drawing on the local experi-

ence of communitarian networks for collective work (faena), family celebrations (compadrazgo), celebrations of the Catholic ceremonial cycle with its different ritual elements, and so on. The villager mentioned above, let us call him Juan, had a handmade poster on his door inviting his neighbors to meet in the Comité de la Esperanza (Committee of Hope). Some twenty-five people turned up. Juan's welcome speech drew heavily on the ritual formality employed by fiscales on solemn occasions. He reminded his neighbors of what they had achieved in earlier years and suggested that they invite Adrián (the upcoming PRD candidate for delegation chief) to the next meeting to get a complete overview of the existing welfare programs; he would help them obtain the benefits to which they might be entitled.

Apparently this was the first in a series of meetings that led to his neighbors getting microcredits, food assistance, cheaper milk, housing credits, health insurance, and unemployment insurance, well in advance of the next election of delegation chief in July 2012. The welfare programs were mostly managed by different officers at the delegation headquarters, but Juan pointed out that people would meet with difficulties if they approached them on their own. So he volunteered to mediate, finding out what documents were needed, receiving them, and passing them on to the PRD candidate, Adrián. "Adrián will support us, and we will support him," Juan explained.

Furthermore, he outlined plans for parties on upcoming important dates, for instance Mother's Day in May, when they would ask the candidate to help out with some tacos. He also suggested other possibilities for financing a party. In this way they would revive and expand previous problem-solving and social networks where enjoyment was part of the social glue (see for instance de Vries 2002, 912). Adrián, the candidate, would help them obtain their benefits, and in return they would support him in the 2012 elections. In addition they would socialize and have a good time, along the lines of other communitarian ritual celebrations.

Three weeks after this meeting I talked with one of the persons who had been there, and learned that the candidate had indeed arrived, informed them of the possibilities, and told them what documents they needed for each benefit. Juan had received the documentation from his neighbors and passed it on to the candidate, who would be interested in speeding up the handling process and securing a positive outcome. During the first meeting, Juan pointed out that it also would be better to use this help to obtain medical assistance, because the government institution "makes it difficult for us" (*nos pone trabas*).

Díaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni (2009, 230) argue that the federal welfare programs could not be used to create clientelist relationships because benefits should be distributed according to objective poverty criteria, but the present example shows that although criteria might very well be objective, people needed help from politicians to obtain the benefits even if they met the criteria. Acopilco is located only a fifteen-minute bus ride from the administrative center of the delegation; without the mediation of brokers, populations in most rural localities would meet with even more difficulties when trying to obtain welfare benefits to which they are entitled.

There was a widespread idea in Acopilco that the community ought to get something in return for their votes. The community's commissioner organized

parties for the comuneros with the candidate from the PRD in 2006, giving him a chance to win votes. An ex-commissioner told me that this time they would demand more in return for their votes. Again we perceive that reciprocity forms part of the lifeworld of these villagers. When I was back in the village in December 2006, several of the local PRD militants and organizers were now employed in the delegation. There is no reason to believe that this phenomenon is restricted to Acopilco. For example Roniger (2004, 354), building on studies from a series of European and Latin American countries, argues that "clientelism . . . leads to over-employment and under-qualified personnel in public administration." In communities of the Mesoamerican tradition, like Xico and Acopilco, political clientelism of this type enjoys a high degree of legitimacy; it approximates yet another expression of communitarian institutions. As Medina and Stokes (2007, 69) remark, when clientelism is operating, clients are often better off under a patron, although clientelism as such is not necessarily a system to their advantage.

Political Clientelism in Acopilco, 2012

Ten days before the 2012 elections I returned to Acopilco to do fieldwork. On my morning walk I saw the well-known face of Adrián on an election poster, but the name of the party on the poster was not PRD but PRI/Verde! Why was he a PRI candidate, when he used to be a PRD candidate? I had heard about a similar case in the election of delegation chief in 2000; on that occasion the change was from the PRD to the PAN. I was curious to find out what had happened, so I found Juan, the intermediary, and obtained an interview with him; the local PRI cell was also represented.

Juan explained that he had worked with Adrián over several years, within the PRD structure, but a few months before the elections the PRD appointed another candidate for delegation chief. Adrián would still be a candidate, but now for PRI/Verde, in return for supporting PRI candidates at the higher levels. Juan told me that the people whom Adrián had helped still understood that they were to vote for him, so from March on the intermediaries were busy explaining that now they were to vote for the PRI, not for the PRD.

Juan, who was in direct communication with the clients, had the impression that the majority would vote for Adrián. But there were many more intermediaries in the delegation, and I heard different estimates as to how many would follow Adrián over to the PRI. They were confronted by the dilemma between party loyalty (for some), principles, and invested clientelist work, which might yield fruits in the form of jobs if Adrián won, supposing they followed him. Otherwise this work would be wasted. Both economic and moral rationalities, the latter based on reciprocity, were at play in these dilemmas. Meanwhile Juan rejoiced that Adrián was on top in the surveys; this was very important, since "people go with the one who is on top" (*la gente se va con el que está arriba*); Lazar (2004, 231) reports the same observation from Bolivia.

On Election Day, July 1, in the morning, I observed people queuing up to vote. At about 2:30 p.m. I entered the patio of Juan, who had invited me for carnitas, the most accessible form of ritual food in Acopilco. Juan told me later that 664 adults

from different parts of Acopilco came to "have a taco" in his patio; this was a considerably greater number than those who participated in his problem-solving network. He pointed out that the costs, about twenty-four thousand pesos, were covered by him and two PRI militants, all of them drawing on contributions from their local people.

Earlier on, he explained, he and his group had divided the list of people in his area between them, making house-to-house visits (canvassing), asking people for whom they planned to vote. He thought this had also contributed to remind the members of the network to actually turn up and vote, so they could show the voter ink on their fingers when they joined the carnitas party. This party (convivio) was much the same as the ritual meal offered by the fiscales during the fiesta, with the exception of the invitation being passed on privately, not in an assembly, as the fiscales do. It is, of course, not allowed to invite voters to free meals on Election Day, hence the relative secrecy. But Juan commented to me that they might put up a banner saying "Happy Birthday" to circumvent the regulation. He finished the story of the taco party by pointing out the importance of "being affectionate and charismatic with them" (*el afecto, el carisma que uno tiene con ellos*). Like the ticking off on the list of mobilized voters in 2006, there was an aspect of monitoring to Juan's carnitas party, checking out the electoral ink blotch on the fingers of the guests; but this occasion was friendlier and more trusting and had no sense of threat or coercion. As Nichter (2008, 19) states, it is also worthwhile to monitor the turnout of mobilized voters.

When the electoral results were ready, Juan reported that Adrián had won the delegation for the PRI, as the party's only delegation chief in the Federal District. Acopilco had been crucial for Adrián's victory; of the 1,145-vote advantage he obtained over the PRD candidate, 1,125 came from Acopilco (IEDF 2012). Reciprocity-based rationality prevailed; by the end of the year, Juan was hired in the delegation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The two local societies that we have studied feature strong communitarian institutions and practices, which imply frequent interaction and long-term relationships among their members, generating multiple networks of reciprocity, a ritual language, and a communitarian lifeworld. One important contribution of our study is the concrete description of the operation of two networks of political clientelism in these communities: a problem-solving network of women in Xico and a network of neighbors in Acopilco. There are differences between these networks, but they both draw on the participants' experiences regarding the way in which most collective tasks are carried out: forming and participating in networks. In these communities, to activate networks and rely on reciprocity is part of their lifeworld, or "their habitual knowledge," as Auyero (2000, 72) terms it.

In Auyero's study (2000, 67), networks must be initiated by a "founding favor" from a broker or patron, while Szwarcberg (2012, 232–234) describes babysitting, money lending, or counseling as a way to found a clientelist network. Their stud-

ies have been carried out in localities, which are not communities. Our main contribution is to document a habit of creating and taking part in networks. In the communities studied, networks of political clientelism do not require a foundational favor, since networking is the obvious way to carry out all sorts of tasks.

Another contribution of our article is to demonstrate the importance of studying communitarian forms of organizing (when applicable) as part of the study of political clientelism. This finding gives a new perspective on the issues of reciprocity and legitimacy. In the communitarian context these are both generated by the specific practices of the communities, granting legitimacy to the reciprocal practices of the clientelist problem-solving networks.

Consequently, in the communities under study there is little need for force, threats, or coercion in order to secure the clients' electoral reciprocation. The exchanges are considered legitimate, since they are embedded in the communitarian lifeworld of reciprocity. Even monitoring, which some scholars (Szwarcberg 2011, 19; Alvarez-Rivadulla 2012, 32–34) see as an integral part of clientelism, has a friendly version in the context of our case communities, as we observe in Juan's taco party on Election Day. Auyero (2000, 73–74), Alvarez-Rivadulla (2012, 25), and Schefner (2001, 620) express the view that the legitimacy of brokers (and patrons) rests heavily on their capacity to deliver the goods. In our context we find that legitimacy is intimately linked to norms of reciprocity. To deliver the goods, whatever they are, is simply the patron/broker's part of the bargain. In noncommunitarian contexts, lifeworlds of reciprocity are likely to be weaker; therefore the degree of legitimacy among the clients and the use of force, threats, and coercion against them may vary greatly from what we found in our cases. This indicates that it is important in any study of political clientelism to specify whether the locality under study is a community.

Furthermore, we have added to the knowledge concerning the role of problem-solving clientelist networks in the interface between the citizens and the state: to bridge the gap. In both the state of Veracruz and the Federal District, there are public programs providing social and economic benefits to citizens. However, the state does not manage to extend these to the citizens; citizens must rely on the mediation of brokers and patrons in order to actually obtain these benefits, even when they are entitled to them. Hilgers (2011, 570), referring to the tendency among many social scientists to see clientelism as a traditional relationship that would disappear "as society modernized and professionalized state agencies began to redistribute resources and ensure security based on impersonal regulations," states that it was thus "contrary to all expectations that central administrative structures . . . connected with traditional sectors . . . through an interface mirroring clientelism." Like Hilgers, we have found that local middle-class people have taken to trading their expertise in the rules of the external world. This would constitute a fair summing up of the modus operandi of the brokers Luisa and Juan and the patron Adrián.

Moreover, in combination with the generalized multiparty competition in Mexican elections in recent decades, bridging the gap between citizens and the state also feeds into expressions like "the democratization of clientelism" (Gay 2006,

212; Hilgers 2012, 16) and to considering political clientelism as part of a citizenship practice (Lazar 2004, 228). We maintain that political clientelism carried out in contexts like those we have described permit a view of the practice that is quite different from that of the captive client, subject to coercion and force, with no other option than to sell her vote, although such cases probably also exist.

Although our primary concern has been descriptive, our findings seem to support a more nuanced picture of political clientelism, instead of one fixed norm for every imaginable case, which appears to be the ideal of Hicken (2011, 300–302). We take his text to imply that any serious study of political clientelism should contribute to a grand theory of clientelism, equally valid in all places and at all times. We agree that the use and generation of theory are necessary, but so is an adequate choice of methodology, which greatly influences the material on the basis of which theories can be crafted. Our contribution to the debate, therefore, is to highlight how ethnographic fieldwork offers an understanding of the ways in which context is decisive. In our view, this insight counteracts any dream of a universal theory of clientelism.

We consider that it is the ethnographic approach that has allowed us to discover how the communitarian lifeworld and networking practices prepare the ground for the legitimate operation of problem-solving clientelist networks. The failure of the state to reach out to citizens is also part of this context. We think that this understanding in itself is valuable, even if it is not generalizable. However, considering that we have studied two communities, finding a lot of common ground, it might be worthwhile in future studies to consider the possibility that other communities with Mesoamerican roots might exhibit similar traits. Maybe we are on the track of a community adaptation to political clientelism.

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