"That's how you win elections": Electoral Transactions, Political Consultancy and the Personalization of Politics in Colombia's Democratic Reform[1]

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Résumé

Cet article analyse les intersections entre les pratiques expertes de la gestion politique, mises en place avec les réformes néolibérales du début des années 1990 en Colombie, et le système clientéliste traditionnel. Même si les deux phénomènes sont enracinés dans des

systèmes de valeur contraires, et donc entraînent différentes formes de transaction politique entre les politiciens et leurs électeurs, ils suivent la même logique, celle de la personnalisation de la politique. Selon cette nouvelle logique politique, les individus charismatiques deviennent le centre de l'action collective tandis que les identités politiques construites sur des intérêts collectifs sont désarticulées. De manière plus spécifique je porte mon attention sur les modifications institutionnelles qui ont parrainé un corps politique individualisé. Je soutiens que ces variations ont promu l'utilisation de styles populistes et autoritaires dans la communication et la pratique politique. En dernier lieu, j'explore comment le pragmatisme, caractéristique des pratiques politiques, a aussi été redéfini par les nouvelles ontologies politiques, en accentuant ainsi les schismes entre les formalismes institutionnels et les réalités de l'activité politique. Cette rupture est la fondation pour la formation de nouvelles subjectivités politiques loin des idéologies politiques de partis.

Mots clés: Culture Politique, La subjectivité néolibérale, Clientélisme, Gestion Politique, Représentation Politique, Amérique Latine.

Abstract

In this article, I analyze how the expert practices of political management in Colombia, introduced along with the neoliberal reforms of the early 1990s, accommodated to the clientelistic political system. Even though the two phenomena are enrooted in opposite value systems, and thus entail different forms of political transaction between politicians and their constituencies, they follow the same political logic of personalized of politics. In this process, charismatic individuals are the center of collective action, whereas political identities constructed upon collective interests are disarticulated. I focus my attention on the institutional shifts that sponsored an individualized body politic by means of the disarticulation of collective political representation. I argue that these shifts promoted the widespread use of authoritarian and populist styles in political communication and political practice. Finally, I explore how the new ordering in the political field has redefined pragmatism for political practitioners who, in their practice, accentuate a traditional mismatch between political formalisms and practiced politics. This rupture grounds the formation of new forms of political subjectivity that overpass any partisan political ideology.

Key words: Political Culture, Late-liberal subjectivities, Clientelism, Political Management, Political Representation, Latin America

The concepts of value and democracy often come together in public discourse to refer to the ethical principles of democracy (democratic values), or to refer to democracy as a collectively desired practice (the value of democracy). However, our bodies cringe when we switch conjunctions and rather than thinking of value *and* democracy, or the value *of* democracy, we think about value *in* democracy. We resist thinking about democracy as a cluster of practices that encompass measurements, calculations or negotiations. We rather think of democracy as the sublime collective pursuit of the common good. But, the fact is that collectivities in contemporary democracies materialize through the concrete mechanism of elections. And elections involve management, budgeting, and transactions. In short, managing elections involves the calculation of value, understood as the actions taken in order to mobilize voters. In reforming democracies, these actions run along diverse, sometimes opposite, political rationales. And this fragmented landscape composes the conditions where public lives and political identities unfold.

I spent twelve months of fieldwork during the electoral season of 2010 in Bogotá, Colombia, among political strategists, political journalists, politicians, campaign managers, and electoral observation NGOs. During this time, I observed the paradoxical intersections between two opposing forms of political management: the traditional, privately run, favor-exchange and problem-solving networks of clientelism and the expert managing of public opinion (i.e. political marketing). How can clientelism and political marketing be compatible? This question puzzled my mind. On the one hand, clientelism entails private and informal associations to solve public problems that formal state services might not solve (O'Donnell 1996). In these networks, political power is obtained through the negotiation of particular commodities, state services or favoritisms in public contracting in exchange for votes. These networks are embedded in longstanding private ties of trust and solidarity, but also in relations of authority and patronage (Auyero 2000), thus hindering open and public competition. On the other hand, political marketing is all about competition and publicity. The premise of the industry is to be able to seduce the voter by managing the candidates' public reputation. As I heard many times from political practitioners of all stripes, knowing how to stir all of these contrary forces is "how you win elections."

Clientelism and political marketing in reforming democracies share the novel institutionalized ground of "personalized politics" (Moreno and Escobar-Lemmon 2008). In this process, institutional arrangements support charismatic individuals as the center of collective action, whereas political identities constructed upon collective interests are disarticulated (Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008). The democratic

reforms introduced during the late 1980s and the early 1990s in Latin America and elsewhere sponsored the decentralization of political power in order to undermine the clientelistic structures that hindered democratic development (Edwards 2001; Hemment 2004; Leal Buitrago and Davila L. 1990; Medellín 2005). The increased competition for power among political actors entailed by these new political realities brought new ways to sponsor electoral mobilization that were no longer anchored in a sense of the collective but rather centered on individual appeal (Johnson 2009). Party politics lost its centrality giving way, on the one hand, to the political management industry and its expert management of public emotions, and on the other hand, to vote buying[2] as an even more pervasive electoral practice. Although clientelism might result an uncomfortable and patronizing label that has been overrepresented in academic language to index and analyze Latin American politics (Auyero 2000), its resilience in a variety of institutional platforms begs a closer analysis of the political contexts and macro-political logics that reproduce it. This article argues that the late-liberal ethical and institutional shifts that posit the individual, instead of the collective, as bearer of political responsibility (Coles 2004; Rose 1999) both sponsored the introduction of contemporary political marketing in contexts of political reform and reinforced "traditional" clientelistic political arrangements. These complex, diverse and sometimes paradoxical forms of political engagement have harvested fragmented forms of political subjectivity.

First, I outline the institutional conditions and political context surrounding the introduction of political marketing. Second, I analyze how the disarticulation of collective political representation further promoted the widespread use of vertical, authoritarian and populist styles both in political communication (Laclau 2005) and in political practice. Finally, I explore how the new ordering in the political field has redefined pragmatism for political strategists and managers who, in their practice, accentuate a public sense of mismatch between political formalisms and practiced politics. This rupture grounds forms of political subjectivity that overpass any political ideology, therefore posing questions on the modes of political participation in late-liberal reforming democracies.

Your opinion matters: The promise of political modernity

The sense that there is a schism in how political practice is organized in Colombia is a widespread notion among political practitioners, as well as a common representation in public discourse used to describe the electoral behavior of Colombians. On the one hand, the "voto de

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[2] Vote buying is the term used for giving goods or money in exchange for votes. The most common commodities exchanged are tiles and groceries.

opinión" [opinion vote] or "voto a consciencia" [conscientious vote], in which the voter follows his or her own choice, is represented as a desired political reality anchored in ideals about a political modernity where a rational deliberative subject (Dewey 1954; Habermas 1989) exercises the right to choose. Standing in opposition is the "voto amarrado" [tied vote] or clientelistic vote, a vote associated with the political traditions of a rural Colombia, in which personal interest (translated into getting personal benefits in exchange for votes) prevails over the common good. What caught my attention is that there are seldom other categories to represent political subjectivity in the country. Party politics, social movements, or political ideologies rarely serve as indexical principles; rather political collectivities are classified according to this bipolar umbrella of political practice where individual conscience or individual need replace political identities based on collective claims (Laclau 2005).

In the days previous to the first round Presidential Election Day, Colombia's public scene saw the spectacular popularity of the Green Party's presidential candidate Antanas Mockus skyrocket. The increasing popularity of this mathematician, twice mayor of Bogotá, was dubbed the "Green Wave." This movement found its power in the communitarian rhetoric of its leader, who vehemently highlighted the importance of building a public culture of collective responsibility, transparency and respect through education. In several public acts, the party followers marched in their green garments cheering: "My Professor, My President." All of the major public media, and web-based social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, were awash with the images of this collective enthusiasm. The enthusiasm was such that Santos's campaign (Mockus's main rival) brought in Ravi Singh, the social network self-proclaimed guru[3], in order to counteract the "Green Wave." However, on May 30th after the first round presidential election[4], the polling results showed that the enthusiasm for the "Green Wave" was not as collective as the media portrayed it. Juan Manuel Santos, the official government candidate, well known for his role as Minister of Defense and for his closeness to President Alvaro Uribe, won the election by a 25% margin.

After learning the devastating results for the Green Party, Antanas Mockus gathered with his followers at his political headquarters. The members of the Green Party were enraged at the results. Antanas

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[3] A recent article of a Colombian news Internet portal (La Silla Vacía, April 24th 2011) describes how Singh's image and reputation was built on a series of misrepresentations. He was presented as the genius behind Obama's Internet campaign when, in fact, he had not worked for Obama at any point.

[4] The Colombian presidential electoral system has the possibility of Ballotage. If on the first electoral round none of the candidates have an absolute majority, a second round is carried out where the two candidates who obtained the highest results on the first round face each other.

Mockus looked quietly at them while trying to deliver a few lines. The collective discontent manifested in the endlessly repeated political chants: "My consciousness is worth more than a 'guarito' and a 'tamal'[5]"- "I came because I wanted to, nobody paid me to come here."

The political sentiments of the Green Party capture the general perception that the opinion voter exercises his or her own will, beyond individual needs. According to this interpretation, having a political consciousness that transcends the materiality of everyday life enacts freedom. Seen at the level of what it is, the opinion vote looks like an emerging form of collective consciousness against the personalized political tradition and weak institutional organization of Colombia, a consciousness beyond personal interest. However, if attention is directed to the techniques used to mobilize the opinion vote, chiefly to the careful craft of propaganda, this kind of voter emerges as a lonely individual obeying his or her individual experience anchored in emotionality (Marcus 2002). Looking back at recent Colombian political history one notices the appearance of the opinion vote as a promise of liberation at the expense of collective representation.

The introduction of a concept such as "opinion vote," and the political consultancy industry that developed around it, are associated with the institutional modifications brought about by neoliberal reforms, which has lead politics the "American way" (Johnson 2009; Plasser 2000, 2009). Although there is no official history of the entrance of political consultancy into Colombia, the different political strategists I interviewed throughout my fieldwork signaled President Virgilio Barco's campaign in 1985/1986 as the first campaign to follow strategic directives. Eduardo Mestre, a senior politician who took a leading role in Barco's campaign, highlighted that the major changes introduced were the use of opinion polls to help design the political strategy, and the use of television as the major media to mobilize the political messages. For this task, Jack Leslie, a U.S political consultant, was hired.

The introduction of such techniques point to the emergence of a different kind of vote, no longer cast in favor of a specific party platform, but instead on the basis of emotional identification with attitudes promulgated through media (Applbaum 2004; Dávila 2001; Mankekar 1999; Mazzarella 2003). Miguel Silva, top Latin American political consultant, analyzes this phenomenon in the following way:

> What happens at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s is the emergence of an urban opinion vote. When the country [had a demographic structure] where

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[5] A common practice associated to clientelism is to give out aguardiente-a popular drink made out of sugar cane- and tamal –a popular meal- at the political gatherings held by politicians who intend to buy votes.

30% was urban and 70% was rural, there was one political reality. When this reverses, the political reality changes. And it is very interesting indeed because an independent voter starts to emerge (...). As this opinion vote emerges, and the political parties cannot channel this vote, independent candidates start to appear.[6]

Although demographic change played a crucial role in the emergence of other forms of politics, phenomena such as the massification of television consumption, and the introduction of political decentralization as a means to achieve liberalization sealed a change of course in Latin American politics. As Plasser (2000, 2009; Plasser and Plasser 2002; Plasser and Lengauer 2009) notes in his seminal work on the rise of American political consultancy as a global practice, it mainly occurred during the 1980s when television became the lead medium worldwide. The long-standing tradition in American politics of using television and advertisement techniques for political purposes expanded to other regions of the world where party politics was being disarticulated to give way to personalized politics[7]. The American political tradition of the public managing candidates' images rather than party programs (Johnson 2009) was soon finding fertile ground in reforming democracies elsewhere.

President Barco's campaign developed in the midst of Colombia's institutional reform, which opened the way to the liberalization of the market and to political decentralization. Year 1985 saw the first efforts to open Colombia's protectionist trade protocols. The World Bank approved the Trade Policy and Export Diversification Loan to help the country in opening its foreign trade (Edwards 2001). This initial reform gave way to subsequent reforms, which achieved their final form in 1990, under President César Gaviria's "Apertura Económica" (literally translated as economic opening), opening Colombia's boundaries to foreign investment and privatization. At the same time, efforts were made to open the rigid bipartisan political system, so many times blamed as a major cause for the political instability of the country (Leal Buitrago and Dávila L. 1990; Palacios and Safford 2002).

In 1989, a very strong student movement, some liberal government officials, the liberal media and some leftwing political groups came together in a call for unity and civic mobilization beyond partisan lines. The claim to redesign a new political constitution with a participatory orientation comprised a horizon of hope for a new collective future without violence (Lemaitre 2009). To this end, the political constitution had as main goal to decentralize and pluralize the government structure. The longstanding exclusionary and clientelistic

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[6] Miguel Silva, interview by author, Bogotá, Colombia, October 20th, 2009.

[7] The main markets for American Political Consultancy were Latin America, Western Europe and Eastern Europe (Johnson 2009).

bipartisan tradition of Colombia was the target of these reforms. The different and diverse actors involved in the movement for the reformation of the constitution agreed that the party structure of the country, and its distribution of political power[8], was at the heart of the widespread political violence (Hoskin 1998; Lemaitre 2009). Therefore in 1991, the newly written political constitution relaxed the requirements for political association[9]. The law granted different mechanisms for any citizen, independent of party affiliation, to participate in government.

The newly introduced rules for political participation entailed that the electoral body would have to mature into an independent (read individualized) one that reenacted liberal principles of choice in the political arena (Rose 1999). The "independent" voter became a political ideal to navigate new conditions of political modernity, conditions that entailed the diversification of political options. Like a responsible shopper, this new voter was expected to take part in politics knowing the options available that better suited his or her individual reality. However, this market-oriented political "independence" disarticulated political representation as we used to know it, and played with structural political traditions of clientelism accentuating candidate-centered politics.

The disarticulation of the political

In the 2010 election, the efforts to regulate political association in order to give more strength and control to the political parties were not enough. Still, a candidate-centered politics was preponderant in circulating political messages. The Green Party, as a new party with little community organization work, relied exclusively on the personal charisma of Antanas Mockus to stir individual emotion as a way to mobilize political sympathies. The euphoric political chant "My Professor, My President" invoked Mockus's public reputation as a pedagogue, and it expressed the public support to what came in the public eye to be considered an anti-political project. As Mockus's

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[8] From 1958 until 1974, after the period of civil war between *Liberales* and *Conservadores,* these two parties shared power by a rule of alternation. What this meant was that every government period had to be alternated between the two parties. When one party was in office, the other one was guaranteed to have a share of bureaucratic positions. This arrangement would ensure that the state resources would be equally divided between the two parties. These associations distributed public offices and public contracting among party factions, leaving no room for the broader public to participate in how budgetary lines were distributed (Leal Buitrago y Davila L. 1990). The regional political chiefs and their political machines of clients and bureaucracy managed how the Colombian state worked.

[9] The enthusiasm was such that by 2003 a political reform had to be carried out in order to regulate the existing political parties and political movements that by 2002 reached the outrageous number of 85 (Reyes González 2004).

Campaign Manager explained:

> The people who voted for us voted out of non-conformity. Independently from their social status, their academic background, our voters were people who did not agree with Uribe's government (...) *people who wanted another lifestyle* (...). The people who voted for Antanas were mainly urban young people, the upper, upper-middle, and middle-class from urban centers. We couldn't *seduce* the lower classes (...) All of the beneficiaries of the social policy of Alvaro Uribe are in strata[10] 1 and 2, as it has to be, but we couldn't [appeal to them]. If the President has been giving you a subsidy of 100.000 pesos every month [US$ 50], and he says: "the candidate you should vote for is such because the other candidate is going to take away the subsidy away from you," *there is no emotion you can appeal to, the only thing there is pure [self-] interest.[11]*

The disarticulation of party identification and class interest (Beck 1994; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Greenberg 2008; Jameson 2000) as a referent for collective representation is one of the most salient features of the current political moment in Colombian politics. Although the Campaign Manager mentions a stark division between upper classes and lower classes, the former being mobilized by emotional motivation and the latter being mobilized by personal interest, he makes no mention of a class-oriented political program. Rather, what brings together the Green Party followers is the generalized repudiation of corruption. The converse is also the case. The Campaign Manager's depiction of the beneficiaries of the government's policy has the poorest populations not acting according to class-consciousness but rather according to the satisfaction of individual needs.

Scholars who have diagnosed the disarticulation of political representation under late-liberalism see the return to spectacular forms of community in which such ties are shaped by media practices (Albro 2001; Debord 1994; Goldstein 2004) – such as the emergence of lifestyles (Beck 1994; Jameson 2000; Rose 1999), consumption (Dávila 2001; Grewal 2005) and cultural and affective identification (Muehlebach 2007; Povinelli 2002; Ong 2004) - as the loci for political representation. The current Colombian political moment is yet another testament of the pervasiveness of these late-liberal global configurations in which expert practices (Paley 2001, 2004; Shore and Wright 1997) and media management (Applbaum 2004; Dávila 2002; Mazzarella 2003) are increasingly mediating the formation of political

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[10] The tributary and service system in Colombia is divided in 6 strata, 6 being the highest paying stratum and 1 being the lowest paying. The strata are determined according to income and zoning patterns of the cities and rural areas.

[11] Campaign Manager, interview by author, Bogotá, Colombia, June 30th 2010.

constituencies.

The techniques unfolded to appeal to an emotional voter, and the clientelistic tactics used to seduce the vote of the dispossessed are increasingly defining political subjectivities. As the Campaign Manager's perception of the 2010 election conveys, the question at stake when planning a political strategy is not *what candidate or party* the electorate votes for, *but how they vote*. For the Green Party, with its strong anti-corruption discourse, changing the cultural configurations that sponsor voting practices supporting the clientelistic structures of the country was a priority. In this sense, it did not matter what actual ideological orientation the party followers had. What mattered was that the followers did not join seeking personal benefit. People with a left-oriented background met people who have been classified as neoconservatives, but all of them shared what another party member described as a sense of "indignation". The emotional campaign that the Green Party launched appealed to this primary feeling towards Colombian politics rather than to any ideological certainties. The possibility of "change" became a guiding force.

Conversely, this disarticulation of collective referents has a flip side. In the context of Colombia and its particular political history, personal interest, as emotion, has also being imbued with political force. Metaphorically, J. J. Rendón, the political strategist for Juan Manuel Santos, represented his success in defeating the Green Wave. As he explained, Santos's campaign was like a Roman Legion that had all of its forces aligned. Mockus's campaign, on the contrary, had no organization. Instead, its main asset was the populous barbarians who fed the Green Party lines. Ancient history teaches that even though the Romans were fewer than their barbarian enemies, their organization defeated the tumultuous masses. Rendón's explanation points to the ability of the Santos campaign to organize the different kinds of voters and interests composing the political reality of Colombia. Learning how to accommodate the clientelistic system, as well as how to cope with emerging forms of political subjectivity, are keys for the success of political management in the region.

The unrelenting deployment of clientelistic practices in order to "win elections" in spite of the modernizing impulse introduced by media-oriented politics, raises questions about the particular type of this late-liberal political moment in countries that have not followed the traditional path of modernization (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Ong 2004), or that are considered peripherally modern (Escobar 1995; García Canclini 1995; Mignolo 2007; Quijano 2005). The individualistic and personalized forms of politics that institutionalized late-liberal rationales sponsor found the perfect backdrop in the Colombian political tradition of clientelism. The modernizing current introduced with the new technologies for political management was incorporated

and adapted to support the political and cultural configurations that it was supposed to undermine. The personalized political communication style inspired by the "American political management school," coupled with the reforms carried out in order to decentralize the State, fit well with the long-standing tradition of populism in the region, which combines both personalized communication and clientelistic practices.

The populist logic of political communication and clientelism both presuppose candidate-centered forms of political allegiance. Populist styles in political communication create the illusion of direct contact between highly charismatic leaders and their citizens (Barczak 2001; Torre 2005; Sánchez 2008) by generating or at least reinforcing a consciousness that operates in binaries. This means that the populist leader often draws Manichean distinctions (Laclau 2005) – us/them, good/evil, correct/corrupt - in order to create mutual recognition among a large and diverse group of individual citizens and the populist political project. Within this particular style of communication, the aim is not to appeal to agonistic interest-oriented public spheres but rather to appeal to a widespread public consensus grounded in forms of emotional ascription and recognition (Calhoun 1988; Greenberg 2008). Alvaro Uribe's government, by which this populist trend was deeply marked, showed the Colombian public that populism was still effective. Uribe's highly televisual government (Rincón 2008), which waged a constant fight against FARC guerrillas and Chavez's Venezuela, enjoyed great popularity throughout his eight years in office. His legacy was evident during the 2010 Presidential election. In a messianic vein, Mockus presented himself as the bearer of a public morality in a corrupt country, while Santos crafted for himself the image of being the extension of Uribe's project and hence the carrier of prosperity and progress. Both messages appealed to ideas of a brighter future, of a yet to become national blooming, encompassing all citizens. The overarching image of the nation served as a powerful recognition tool to overshadow any political ideology and to appeal to a broad majority of voters.

Popular politics in practice

The "direct" relations between a leader and "the people" created through the crafting of a populist public discourse is not just a mode in political communication, it is also present in the practices of clientelism. The collective ascription to a visible charismatic individual rather than to a political project is crucial in understanding clientelistic networks. As many scholars have noted (Bailey 1971; Bosco 1992; Escobar 2002; Scott 1969), patron-client relations entail an asymmetric power relation in which the patron regulates the access to resources. Although this phenomenon occurs in every political context, the degree of its intensity depends on the institutional frailty of each country (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002; O' Donnell 1996;

Roniger 1994). Moreover, as Auyero (2000) notes, this negotiation of resources is also embedded in deeply enrooted relations of solidarity as well as in cultures of authority. Therefore, clientelism is a complex system that integrates cultural dispositions, objective institutional conditions and emotional ties. In this system, both state (or sometimes private) resources and social bonds travel hand in hand (Roudakova 2008; Schiller 2011).

Colombia, with its profound regionalism, its traditional informal economy (Thoumi 1999) and its highly hierarchical society (Palacios and Safford 2002), has produced a system of personalized politics in which individual social connections are key in accessing the State (Deas 1993). In short, the informal networks surrounding the political field determine its operability (Ledeneva 1998; Yang 1989).

In several meetings I held with local politicians, I met with characterizations of these classic clientelistic transactions as a complex web of favors and allegiances (Auyero 2000). At a broader scale, local *leaders* gain benefits when contributing with votes to a particular candidate, usually translated into jobs in local administrations. These jobs are effective at a smaller scale because the politician (or patron) is able to make his voters' needs a priority within the local governments' service offices. The patron, more than representing his constituencies' needs before an established government, makes sure that the government exclusively works for those particular needs that will eventually translate back into votes. There is not any specific grounding sociological or cultural category such as ethnicity, age group, economic activity, gender or class that determines which group the candidate will work for (Sartori 1976). Hence, there is no direct representation as such.

These classic arrangements have experienced further personalization by means of the introduction of political decentralization and the increasing entrenchment of politics and drug traffic money. The 1991 constitution, in a communitarian impulse, with its strong emphasis on budgetary and political decentralization attempted to reform these practices by giving municipal communities spaces for political control and participation (Leal Buitrago and Dávila L. 1990). However, as in other countries that underwent similar processes of democratization, these reforms resulted in the appearance of vote buying as a widespread phenomenon (Schaffer 2007). The reforms, which tended to pluralize the political spectrum, resulted in increased forms of competition amongst local politicians[12], without succeeding in

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[12] With the Political Reform of 2003, that intended to strengthen the political parties in order for them to exercise more control, a new modality of voting was introduced to guarantee equal opportunities to all candidates within a political party. For the Congress election two options were granted: the possibility to vote for a complete party list or the possibility to vote for one single candidate within that list. With the vote for a single list

dismantling the political culture of authoritarianism (Fox 1994). Instead, with a new institutional umbrella that allowed more direct citizen participation, more direct forms of political transaction between politicians and voters complemented traditional clientelism.

The informal political transactions and the informal economies at the core of clientelism offer the perfect ground for the introduction of illicit monies into politics (Thoumi 1999). The exchange of goods or moneys for votes is the perfect form for money laundering: the illicit goods buy political power that later benefit the drug cartels. Since the 1980s there has been increasing evidence of such associations. The existing footage that shows Pablo Escobar[13] in Congress (1982) was a premonitory document for the intimate relations drugs and politics would hold in recent Colombian history. As several Colombian scholars have shown (Garay Salamanca 2008; López 2010), the incidences of most of the electoral irregularities happen in those territories where illegal groups have some interest (either because they are sites of coca cultivation or because they serve as strategic corridors for trafficking). For this election, as all the electoral NGOs claimed (MOE 2010), the major risk during the elections was the illegal financing of campaigns and the circulating cash in the streets in order to support these campaigns.

Political pragmatism in a reforming democracy: "An orangutan dressed in a tuxedo"

In this landscape, expert practices of political management have developed. Political consultants, in Colombia, following the logics of political pragmatism (Ormerod 2006), have to deal with these political realities and rules of the game in order to design successful strategies to win elections. In one of the many lunch appointments that I had with Nicolás, the political strategist I closely worked with during my fieldwork, he analyzed political participation through a satirical acronym, CVY, which stands for "Como voy yo" [what's in it for me]. CVY exists at every level, in every political involvement of every group in society. According to Nicolás, the wealthy approach politics seeking the assignation of public contracts or benefits for their economic interests. The poor negotiate services for their communities or

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depending on the amount of votes the list gets that will translate in the number of seats the party will get in Congress. Only the top members of the list then have a chance to win, usually these are the strongest members of the political parties. The possibility of voting for a single candidate regardless of his or her position within the list guaranteed that the "newbies" had an equal chance. However, the competition to win votes got even fiercer.

[13] Pablo Escobar was the head of the Medellín Cartel. His political endeavors were channeled to avoid the approval of the extradition law with the U.S. He launched an illegal "lobbying" campaign amongst Congressmen and a crude terrorist war against the government.

negotiate personal benefits (such as money, construction materials, and commodities in general) in exchange for their vote. And the middle class, commonly associated to the opinion voters, always wants to know how the abstract world of political programs and public policy is going to affect their everyday lives. Nicolás explained that in the management of the CVY is the guiding principle of the political consultancy industry. Political strategists need to learn to navigate the objective conditions of the game board of politics - chiefly the negotiation of benefits in exchange for political support among different factions - as well as to convey to the broader public political messages that appeal to emotion, as in "to get them in motion" (Marcus 2002:12) for a particular candidate.

In a broader sense, Nicolás's analysis of political management practice in Colombia points to the segmentation of the public sphere according to its voting practices rather than its ideological orientations. The introduction of media-oriented forms of politics, in a country in which clientelism continues to be the way in which "elections are won" has, as we have seen, created a schism in political practice. Politics has been compartmentalized and its productive deliberative character constrained. These forms of political practice, in which different sets of strategies operate to captivate different kinds of voting practices, has reenacted the populist tradition of the country where diverse political identities are flattened into binary and deliberatively diminished poles: a media-oriented pole, in which political deliberation occurs around the character of candidates rather than programs matching group interests; and the benefit-oriented pole, in which deliberation is pointless. Interestingly, the segment that discusses does not win elections, and the segment that wins elections does not really discuss. Political deliberation as a productive force has ceased to exist, if it ever did (Lukose 2005; Mouffe 2000). Instead, authoritarian modes of representation, that lump the plurality of political positions into monolithic categories, have been legitimized as the organizing principles of political practice.

Therefore, the political pragmatics that the political management industry presupposes also comes paired with high doses of cynicism, in contexts where pragmatism legitimizes authoritarian tendencies (Benson and Kirsch 2010)[14]. The cultural logics of cynicism entail complicit participation in authoritarian systems in spite of the collective disapproval of those systems (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Rivas 2007; Sloterdijk 1987; Yurchak 2006; Žižek 1989). The particular brand of

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[14] For example, scholars who have studied the introduction of American Political Management techniques in postsocialist Russia (Hutcheson 2009; Fritz Plasser 2009) note that Russian political strategists reproduce behaviors that sponsor the concentration of power in a single political figure. The heritage of a socialist regime still deeply marks the political dynamics in Russia and strategists capitalize those situations in order to win.

Colombian cynicism, fostered by the inner logics of the political field earlier described, is based on taking advantage of a system that is doomed to stagnation, in spite of the eternal quest for modernization (Boyer and Yurchak 2010). As a top Political Consultant explains about the Colombian electorate:

> The Colombian electorate in 1980 was much more immature than the electorate existing today. Today's electorate is very distrustful of political candidates. However, this electorate is not independent of these mass phenomena that happen in Latin America, it is not independent from what happens on TV and from those Machiavellian tricks. Tricks like having an external menace, or giving money in exchange for votes, tricks that have been around since the fifteenth century. They are the same tricks as before, like *Familias en Acción*, which hands down the check to the poorest, or *Agro Ingreso Seguro*[15], that hands down the check to the wealthiest. This is paternalism, the old way of doing politics.[16]

The promise of a political modernity in which free voters decide their political future has not been yet delivered. Instead, the stark division between politics shown on television and the effective politics of pragmatism has widely reduced participation in politics, for the majority of those who actually do participate[17], to an empty public ritual (Handelman 1998) where form and content do not match. Eduardo Echandía, a famous twentieth century liberal politician, described the Colombian democracy as "an orangutan dressed in a tuxedo."

The act, for instance, of casting a ballot that *supposedly* epitomizes the exercise of choice as a civil right is an act that no longer bears its alleged power. During the 2010 congressional and presidential elections, I witnessed several instances where democratic performances became mere formalities with purposes other than what they intended to be. For the second round presidential election, for instance, the members of the Green Party transformed the meaning of casting a ballot. Such action did not entail exercising their right to choose. Instead, casting the ballot was part of a strategy of adding votes in order to obtain a "decorous" result in an election where the final results were a known fact before the polling posts were even set. Choosing, exercising the "conscientious vote" was besides the point in

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[15] In 2009, Uribe's Government faced a scandal over the subsidies granted for agricultural purposes. These subsidies were mainly given to the wealthiest landowners who also are the biggest financial contributors of Uribe's political party.

[16] Political Consultant, interview by author, Bogotá, Colombia, October, 2009.

[17] The traditional abstention rate for the past four presidential elections oscillates around 50% www.registraduria.gov.co

a context that required pragmatism to assure political survival.

In showing me how politics *really* works, Nicolás epitomized political practice in Colombia. When I asked him why he insisted on media practices when politics moved along different channels, his answer rendered bare the ritualistic, empty character of mediated political discourse: "One can't be that blatant, at least we have to pretend." In this bitter and ironic comment "pretending" has a double entendre. On the one hand, it involves dissimulating and masking, the world of the "backstage" of politics hidden from the public eye (Goffman 1959). On the other hand, the act of "pretending" is nothing but a pragmatic tool to aptly manage opposite worlds of voters articulated around contrary forms of political engagement. Skillfully managing these worlds, knowing the inner workings of how they operate, feeling "their skin" or how they behave, and knowing how to stir them simultaneously while keeping them separate are key in succeeding at the democratic game. In short, knowing how to manage these worlds presupposes understanding how much each of these worlds actually adds to a victory, how much value each of these worlds add in winning elections.

Therefore, the existing pragmatics of managing and calculating different forms of political engagement in contexts of political reform poses questions about the power of transformation that these "redeemed" political constituencies actually have. The compatibility and confluence of late-liberal individualistic rationales and clientelistic personalized politics in disarticulating collective configurations suggest that power in democratic contexts has been displaced from the *demos*. The atomized body politic sponsored by the transformations in traditional political representation has given way to the concentration of political power in inner circles of highly charismatic leaders and political entrepreneurs, who rehearse the connection to "a people" by means of the deployment of techniques and tactics aimed to seduce rather than to represent. However, one wonders, is there another way to rehearse politics? Democracy is a hopeless collective dream that wins elections, but still a dream worth pursuing.

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