



---

Democratic Discourse and the Conflict in Colombia

Author(s): Miguel Gamboa and James W. Zackrison

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Colombia: The Forgotten War (Jan., 2001), pp. 93-109

Published by: [Sage Publications, Inc.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3185094>

Accessed: 16/01/2012 09:58

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*Sage Publications, Inc.* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Latin American Perspectives*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# Democratic Discourse and the Conflict in Colombia

by  
*Miguel Gamboa*  
Translated by *James W. Zackrison*

The political negotiation of the armed conflict in Colombia is not simply a matter of the strategic positions of the main contenders; it also reflects a conceptual framework in which leftist intellectuals have played a very important role. The development of this framework began with the search for more efficient ways of conducting the political process but eventually arrived at an unforeseen position with regard to the current negotiation process and the ways of handling social conflicts democratically. This conceptual framework has run into some obstacles and will have to overcome its hidden agendas and adopt new perspectives. At the same time, given the current international situation, both the guerrillas and the establishment will inevitably have to accept elements of the country's new democratic discourse. Furthermore, the general situation in Colombia, despite its democratic window dressing, is characterized by short-lived and partial democratization and legitimation. The resolution of the armed conflict will require changes in the guerrillas' behavior (particularly with regard to kidnapping and drug trafficking) and that of the establishment (e.g., the paramilitaries and the lack of guarantees to the leftist opposition). Social considerations will be reintroduced into the negotiation process. Although it may seem paradoxical, these considerations have been neglected by the guerrillas themselves, who have reduced social issues and political change to rhetorical references to their legitimization. The new democratic discourse in Colombia offers a path toward a negotiated settlement. Above all, a powerful left will be indispensable in legitimating, by democratic means, any reforms. The idea advanced in this article is that legitimation by democratic means is inevitable whether the political participants (including the armed ones) are faced with triumphs, "draws," or defeats.

Miguel Gamboa is a lecturer in Latin American studies at the University of Graz, Austria. He participated in the peasant movement of the 1970s in Colombia and in the political opposition. His current research deals with political theory in Latin America. James Zackrison spent many years as a professor of religious education in Medellín and is currently world director of religious education for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 116, Vol. 28 No. 1, January 2001 93-109  
© 2001 Latin American Perspectives

## TOWARD A NEW DIALECTICAL APPROACH TO CONFLICT AND PEACE

In search of more fertile ground for social and political confrontation, and far from denying or disapproving of it, some sectors have found in the peace process a dividing line on the far side of which a new era in Colombian politics may take shape. When peace is mentioned it is frequently in conjunction with talk about democracy, true citizenship, social movements, rediscovery of politics, human rights, and international humanitarian law. Many of these words have been given new meanings.

It is true that some treat these themes as if they were dealing with a convenient tactical and short-term maneuver while others have purely moral motivation for doing so, attempting to listen to the victims. Nevertheless, there are two sides to the coin of the suffering of these victims. One of these is that the violence must end as quickly as possible so that there are no more innocent victims. This same refrain is heard in the "peace communities" (Durán, 1999) and from people like Julie Freitas (1999), the mother of a North American kidnapped and assassinated in Colombia in March 1999. The other side of the coin is that the use of force against those who create the victims—in other words, armed conflict in the name of the victims—should continue. The range of people who, having fallen victim to the paramilitaries, the government armed forces, or the guerrillas, think this way is equally wide. During the past two decades a number of important themes have been linked together. This has led the social and human sciences to undertake a new reading of national problems and to search for a new basis for social and political practice. The result up to now has been a proliferation of democratic arguments that have penetrated the discourse of the guerrillas and the more modernized segments of the establishment.

The participants in this renovation of Colombian thought have forged multiple direct and indirect links with social activists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), organized populist sectors, and, of course, the organized left. There has also been dialogue with the modernized segments of the establishment, and it could be said that an antielitist configuration has developed within this modernized bourgeoisie. The antielitists have a certain degree of influence on the national scene but can best be characterized as politically impotent. Viewed from a different angle, they are at once asking the establishment to understand the guerrilla movement and calling on the guerrillas to change their way of thinking.

## **QUESTS AND RESULTS: THE NEW LEFTIST DIALOGUE**

Completely apart from any pacifist attitudes, from the beginning of the 1970s a shift began to take shape in the experience of the left (the guerrillas included) with regard to social conflicts. Still subject to the restrictions of the National Front, the situation was compounded by the winding down of the cold war and the impact of the Cuban revolution, followed by the great division of the socialist camp, as well as the anti-imperialist wars in Southeast Asia. In this context the topic of human rights arose in Colombia initially only as a response to increasing official repression but later as a heightened awareness of the general political ethical climate. At the same time, some sectors moved ahead with a reconsideration, still under way, of more general themes such as the international experience and the validity of the paradigms that have given life to the left. In the mid-1960s, Estanislao Zuleta's (1985 [1964]) bold attempt at rediscovering Marxism seemed nothing more than an implausible intellectual exercise, but it was just the opposite. By the end of the 1970s in-depth research in social science and economics pointed to a much more complex country than the one that had inspired the more conventional leftist programs. From any of these perspectives, however, the goal of achieving peace was neither the starting point nor the projected outcome.

The principal motivation was an intense quest for solid foundations for the ongoing polemic. Jorge I. González (1998) has outlined the intellectual evolution of some of the members of the often-maligned but increasingly respected Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (Centre for Investigation and Popular Education—CINEP) in the area of economic theory as follows:

During the 1970s the focus of CINEP's research and action was on developing information with the community (González, 1998: 140). Behind this notion was a process of discussion that led, despite contradictions, to a critique of the positivism of the social sciences and an intense study of Marxist categories, among them "naïve reading." Later the idea became developing information to be read with the community, for example, the elaboration of a national price index (eventually rejected by the Department of National Statistics) and a resurgence of interest in themes dealing with public finance, Keynesianism, and a more "heterodox" Marxism that provided for more realistic scrutiny of capitalist crises (González, 1998: 147). In a third stage, beginning in 1991, emphasis was on the critical reading of information developed by others. The end of "messianisms" became evident, and "voluntarist sentiment" was being abandoned (González, 1998: 150). Representative of

this third stage is the work done in such areas of conflict as the Middle Magdalena region, where contact with highly heterogeneous national and international organisms demanded a quest for consensus. All these three stages were characterized by intellectual openness. By contrast, the mental blindness of the far right left a tragic imprint with the assassination on May 19, 1997, of two CINEP investigators, Mario Calderón and Elsa Alvarado.

During the 1980s it was hoped that the multitude of social movements would reinforce Colombian civil society (Restrepo, 1988a; 1988b) and new impulses for political activism would follow (Fals Borda, 1989; 1993; Santana, 1988). Going deeper into this line of analysis but placing social struggles in a broader historical framework, the CINEP's Mauricio Archila (1995; 1996; 1997; 1998) attacked a view of the "social movement" advocated by what he called the "optimistic sector of researchers" that turned protests into movements. At the heart of civil society, according to Archila, the political was of prime importance. The periods just preceding and following the National Constituent Assembly in 1991 that drew up a new constitution in 1991 were a time when one could speak of the rediscovery of political participation and the concept of citizenship. Nevertheless, the difficulties involved in creating new political structures quickly emerged, and recourse to violence accelerated. The social sciences had to return to the theme of violence, but in the meantime they had gained new perspectives. One of the strong points of the research done by Archila (1997) on social protest during the time of the National Front was his studying it not only as a mere response to the bipartisan system but also as a projection of some of the key players. Archila points to the self-exclusion chosen by some leftist sectors in their endorsing the perspectives of the guerrilla movement and abstaining from the electoral process in the 1970s—an attitude that complemented the exclusion already imposed from above. It must not be forgotten that the Communist party itself, in spite of the attack by the army on Marquetalia in 1964, maintained a prudent attitude, even after the coup d'état by Pinochet, although this event limited the possibility of its legally accomplishing its objectives. One may well inquire if the "combination of all forms of struggle" from the 1980s onward was not really just a new form of political fractiousness including elements of self-exclusion but one that would not have prevented the "illegal participants" from achieving new forms of "socialization" (Pécaut, 1998: 81-82) or of control and incorporation, symbiotic or organic, into the regional economy (Rangel, 1998: 30). Coming back to the topic of social movements, we must note that the quest for an arena for nonviolent social conflict required touching on the theme of equality (already part of the concept of human rights). Existing institutions and legal systems therefore could not be seen as simply ideological apparatuses and instruments of domination, and the legal system

had to be understood in terms of entirely different fundamentals such as democratic participation and the establishment of regulations governing democratic procedures. Looking in this direction, writers such as the philosophers Hoyos Vásquez (1993 and 1999) and Francisco Cortés Rodas (1999) have examined these themes in the tradition of Habermas. The comfortable simplifications focusing on radical voluntarism had had their day.

The focus on human rights has had important practical and theoretical consequences for the left. Diego Pérez (1998: 224) reminds us that in 1987 the CINEP opened the door to a new orientation when the then-director Francisco De Roux (1987) presented a report that took the universal value of human life as its point of departure and made the guerrilla movement subject to oversight for violations of human rights. Other groups directly recognize a new reading of national realities. The Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales (Institute of Political Studies and International Relations—IEPRI), for example, has published 35 books on the results of investigations dealing with violence and democracy, in addition to its journal *Análisis Político*, and has served as a consultant on peace issues. Monsalvo and Domínguez (1999) have brought to light contributions from academic circles in Medellín that show, despite the uncertainty of the latest peace negotiations, the need to examine the models of negotiation employed in Central America—for example, the successful experiments with the so-called peace communities. Here short-term “structural” analysis has given way to studies of actors and institutions broadly considered. Some of these articles ask that other points of view, especially those of the guerrillas, be taken into consideration during the negotiations. Bejarano (1999: 73), for example, argues that the guerrilla movement cannot be asked to examine the violence issue from the point of view of ethics, legitimation, or consequences, nor can it be required to abide by the idea of majority rule. It can, however, be expected to participate in the search for procedures leading to a consensus with the government and civil society that will allow decision making (Bejarano, 1999: 80).

Daniel Pécaut (1998) and Santiago Villaveces (1998) have asked, in connection with these assertions, for the adoption of new analytical perspectives on violence, for example, the point of view of the victims themselves and the perspectives of the various institutions, that for the most part have remained invisible in the study of political conflict negotiation. The country cannot be the same when it has amassed a million internal refugees, when the number of kidnappings is increasing by some 1,500 annually, and when massacres seem to have become routine. These problems require particular methods of investigation. The same can be said for institutions, which have generally been ignored in these studies, suffering the same fate as conservatives and military

and governmental functionaries, as Deas and Gaitán (1995: 50) ironically point out.

### BEYOND THE LIMITS AND HIDDEN AGENDAS OF THE DISCOURSE

In his analysis of the research done by IEPRI on La Violencia, Pécaut (1998) identifies three underlying issues that place limits on the various perspectives.

First, with regard to the interpretation of political strategies, he opposes giving too much validity to the "fixed intentions" of the political participants and to the "more visible contents of the transactions." The investigations should "detect the constraints that circumscribe the participants, the secret guidelines that govern their actions, the sources of power they have available, the maneuvering room they have at any given moment, the diversity of their proposals on what should actually be done, the multiple ends pursued: in sum, the underlying elements of their strategies" (1998: 81).

Second, he notes that "the behaviors of the participants cannot be considered genuine 'responses' to the real workings of the system." The traditional parties have a certain capacity for "integration"; "the massive popular uprising against these parties only began in 1991." In traditional Colombian politics, according to Pécaut, beyond the fact that violence has become routine, there are "elements of political debate and appeals to the law that do not have the same importance as in countries like Brazil or Mexico, where the countries themselves have been assigned the task of directing society." (This brings to mind one of Marulanda's calls to the "three powers" to meet formally and the inclination toward constitutionality demonstrated by the guerrillas.) Pécaut considers that although the work of the IEPRI does not impute the violence "directly to poverty" it does tend to explain it in terms of "political exclusion," forgetting the attempts at mediation between this exclusion and the violence and running the risk of accepting the government as "purely and simply authoritarian." Nevertheless, there are factors other than the formal and informal guidelines of the political system that influence the lack of integration, among them the absence of a unifying *mythos* around which participants might build a framework for action. It is necessary to recognize, in addition, forms of socialization such as client networks or those backed by illegal participants (1998: 81-82). The recent resurgence of ethno-cultural and regional revitalization among the Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific coast (see Grueso, Romero, and Escobar, 1998) may well serve as an example of Pécaut's thesis. His idea about "other forms of socialization"

backed by “illegal participants” leads us to consider the phenomena analyzed by Rangel (1998), such as the “symbiosis” of “armed networks” of guerrillas with local economies or the working relationship they have with local municipalities, as if the coin of self-exclusion mentioned by Archila (1997: 46) with regard to the left during the time of the National Front were reversed.

Third, Pécaut critiques the tendency to present democratization as the true remedy for the violence. The core idea is that “violence has ceased to be defined in terms of distortions of the political process.” The political opening initiated in 1982 “had no effect on the violence.” For the sectors most affected, “the priority is not the improvement of the democratic system but the establishment of some semblance of security.” If the general population sees no effective response on the part of the state, “it will have to abandon institutional politics.” The intensification of democracy is, however, “more indispensable than ever,” though it should be studied not in terms of institutional guidelines but in terms of “tangible political practices.” For example, with regard to local democracy, topics seldom studied are ways of organizing tenant farmers, the gradual transformation of political customs resulting from decentralization, and the operations of labor-union headquarters. Pécaut suggests that these topics are important because political participation has declined since the adoption of the 1991 Constitution when it was hoped that it would increase, but he gives no reasons for this assertion. In any case, the problems of democracy will have to be studied in the light of “recent mutations” and not only as a “historical legacy.” This means taking into account the worldwide trend toward “a deficit of political understanding” (1998: 82-83).

Pécaut (1998: 85) concludes by asking whether it might not be useful, at least from a heuristic and theoretical perspective,

to reverse the starting point, looking first not at the governmental strategies but at those of the various protagonists of violence. After 20 years the arguments in favor of violence have ceased to “respond” to the action of the government and begun to give rise to their own methods of control, provoking interactions that feed on each other and create their own context. The focus is not solely on the tensions to which governmental action must adapt. After remodeling society, they exert an influence directly on the internal aspects of the institutions.

If indeed a more up-to-date and realistic way of dealing with political violence tends to present it as a phenomenon that dilutes the better-known lineal causalities (and here Pécaut is correct) and replaces them with interactions, this does not mean that the participants have lost the capacity to alter the structures. In reality, the principal participants, including the guerrilla leadership, are part of an open system subject to many interventions.



Villaveces (1998), in another critique of the IEPRI, speaks of the need to approach the “other” but not from the “fixed point” characteristic of specialists. “The studies drown out the voices, experiences, and personal memories of those for whom violence is a lived everyday reality,” he argues, and therefore we must turn our attention to neglected areas such as those of “the established institutions and the victims” (1998: 112).

Considering examples related to crop replacement and human rights, let us see how the principal protagonists reconstruct their positions in the context of democratic discourse. This discourse, including, of course, institutional elements, is no longer something external and tends to be something like an “internal” condition of the action.

### **RECOGNITIONS AND PARDONS: THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR LIMITS**

Toward the end of 1998 Peter Romero of the U.S. State Department and a delegation from the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—FARC) got together for the first time in San José, Costa Rica, to talk about the replacement of illegal crops. The FARC representatives had already seen the advantages of this kind of program, given international endorsement. The prospect of crop replacement opened a space for realistic negotiations and the possible renunciation by the FARC of financing from drug trafficking. The Colombian government and, although in only an exploratory way, the Clinton administration were therefore able to raise the issue with the FARC, even at the price of risking serious criticism from their political opposition and possible failure. According to *El Espectador* (March 8, 1999), Pino Arlacchi, executive director of the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP), was scheduled to speak directly with the FARC on March 7, 1999, but the meeting was canceled because of the assassination of three North Americans working with indigenous tribes by a group connected to the FARC. Nevertheless, the topic of crop replacement is still on the docket.

In talking about crop replacement with such highly placed people, the FARC abandoned an ambivalent and confusing line of argument. At one point during a workshop on drug trafficking in 1997 the FARC-EP’s International Commission had argued that drug trafficking, militarism, and neoliberalism were inherent to the situation created by capitalism. The guerrillas once more accused Washington of a double standard, but they never presented any alternative bilateral or multilateral legal or legitimate treatment of the topic. Nevertheless, in later proposing the replacement of crops, with international

participation, they took elements of international legality in the struggle against drug trafficking for granted. The FARC, which has never declared itself in favor of the legalization of any drug and has maintained strict rules about drug use in its own ranks, has had no compunctions (as distinct from the ELN) about working out a deal with the drug traffickers to finance itself. It may be said that for now the FARC is scarcely dealing with the issue of replacement. At the same time, this may be seen as a recognition of institutional instrumentalities (in this case for combatting drug trafficking by means of replacement) when lack of such recognition for any extended period of time will come at a heavy political cost and acceptance will have dynamic and politico-ideological results that cannot be manipulated arbitrarily. The FARC, in the quest for international recognition, has had to modify its explanations of the phenomenon of drug trafficking.

On the issue of human rights, it has also been necessary for it to accept changes. The polarization of the cold war allowed successive Colombian governments to violate human rights and attack their defenders. But after several years of national and international accusations and increasingly sharp contradictions at the heart of the ruling elites, the international context has changed. The return of the Democrats to power in the United States was accompanied, as part of a strong neoliberal package, by the inclusion of human rights as a fundamental element of North American international politics. The nongovernmental organizations that work on human rights achieved a high degree of recognition. In Europe this process had begun even earlier. Calls for concrete measures against the paramilitaries, criticism of the armed forces, and protection for the defenders of human rights were heard daily and sometimes came from the North American government itself.

The violation of human rights by the Colombian government has long served as a justification for the guerrilla movement. The credibility of the complaints has increased at such a rate that they have now been recognized by institutions such as the Justice Department, the Attorney General's Office, and the Public Defender's Office. Parallel to this, the work of the NGOs dedicated to the defense of human rights has also gained credibility. At the same time, however, the ongoing communication of the NGOs with international institutions and various public agencies has offered an understanding quite different from that proffered by the state. The work of this so-called lobby implies a high degree of recognition of these institutions, at least in Europe and the United States, and even of the political parties. The phrase heard most often in campaigns for human rights by groups in the United States, including those that deal with the situation in Colombia, is "Write your congressman!" Interviews with NGOs and left-wing leaders with political parties that could be classified as bourgeois are on the agenda of any investigation of Colum-

bian problems conducted in Europe. The Colombia guerrillas have been observing this process for many years and have learned from it how to do international work. Whereas the radical left saw a convergence of interests between capital and the whole social, political, and institutional process of bourgeois societies, this so-called international work and dialogues with civil society were developed by the guerrillas on a completely different foundation.

At this point, however, I want to emphasize that it is not easy to describe the relationships among the various developments regarding human rights on the national and the international level: the "truth commissions," the international instruments created to combat serious violations of human rights, and the excuses offered by Clinton in the case of the repression in Guatemala and the amnesty requested by the former guerrillas in that country are all part of a new set of rules of behavior that no participant, including the guerrillas, can ignore without risking serious consequences. The Colombian guerrillas seek good relationships with their immediate social base while trampling on many other civil sectors. This combination of behaviors has made it inevitable for increasing criticism to be leveled at the insurgency in the name of human rights or international humanitarian law. Added to the protests against kidnapping, extortion, and attacks on the economic infrastructure are those from popular sectors such as the indigenous groups that have banded together in La Organización Indígena de Antioquia (Antioquia Indigenous Organization—OIA). The kidnapping and subsequent assassination by the FARC of Terence Freitas, Ingrid Washinawatok, and Laheenae Gay, three indigenous defenders of human rights, on March 4, 1999, which may well have been a goal of some far right groups, made the contradictory relationship of the insurgency to the topic of human rights and to civil society a red-hot issue. The leaders of the Uwa community had requested in vain from the beginning that the lives of their fellow villagers be respected. As a result of this tragic incident, the principal human rights organizations that deal with Colombian matters in the United States or in Europe have overwhelmingly criticized the FARC. The guerrillas have discovered, then, that they are not only up against a heartless capital alone but must also face a complex of national and international organizations and institutions. As noted by the political analyst Alfredo Rangel (*El Tiempo*, March 4, 1999), we can no longer work with "an unshakable confidence in the inherent morality of the group that allows the ethical consequences of its actions to be overlooked." According to Mockus (1994), this leads to a shift from moral conviction to moral responsibility.

In conclusion, the guerrillas cannot arbitrarily choose their positions in the face of democratic arguments and procedures but, as part of a process of

growing globalization, are exposed to permanent national and international pressures. This explains why, faced with the assassination of North American indigenous tribal workers by a local command of the FARC, Raúl Rojas, speaking in the name of their national leadership, had no choice but to apologize and promise sanctions against those involved. The insurgency argues from the perspective of legality and legitimation when it asks public opinion to condemn the Colombian government or the paramilitary forces for human rights violations. It is inevitable that those involved will expect stable rules of engagement. The Colombian government, which for a long time paid no attention to national and international criticism about human rights violations, ended up learning that it was better off accepting these critiques than ignoring them.

### **REMAINDERS AND CONTRADICTIONARY TENDENCIES: LEGITIMATION VERSUS DELEGITIMATION**

Colombian political evolution may be classified as “leftover democratization.” A democratic institution is emerging there after a long period of ignoring or even denying the need for one, and it is incapable of resolving the problems produced by its negation. An example is the 1991 Constitution. The legally constituted political regime and the concrete political process are out of phase with each other. From the perspective of the “transition” the creation of a postdictatorship regime is the key to effective action by the various political forces and interest groups. This perspective, also called *neoconstitutionalism*, is not very useful in Colombia (see Gaitán, 1993; Bejarano, 1994; 1995) because since the elimination of the constitutional restrictions (repression or legalized exclusion) that accompanied the National Front the problems seem to lie increasingly in the political process, among them illegal repression (the assassination of members of the Union Patriótica and the genocides carried out by the paramilitary groups) and the absence of any visible force to counteract the traditional political groupings. In Colombia the concepts of “openness” and “democratization” are more helpful than the idea of “transition.” This openness must be played out not only at the level of improving the legal regime (although this is indispensable) or simply as the price that must be paid for negotiation with the guerrillas but, above all, in the political articulation of interests. How can the interests of the various sectors become representable? This is an unavoidable topic in discussions of the democratization of Colombia, and the peace negotiations can contribute to its consideration. The same applies to the problem of the weak leftist

representation in terms of formal democracy. This is important because, as the peace is being negotiated strictly on the basis of military thinking and a redistribution of power is being negotiated on this basis, sooner or later it will be necessary to settle the question of political representation through democratic means. Beyond this, if the negotiation is done on the basis of a package of social reforms, then the eventual agreement must have strong political backing.

In Colombia today there are multiple processes of democratic legitimation of the regime that run parallel to the processes of delegitimation. Legitimation of the regime does not necessarily imply strong approval of the government; it may be just the opposite. Legitimacy is not just legality but also a matter of the degree of social and political conflict that a political system can bear. Opposed to the civilized way in which the state manages conflict is the paramilitary movement, which reduces the legitimacy of the system. The same applies to corruption and the use of drug money for political campaigns. The lack of personal security and respect for life is seen by the common people as the fault of the state, and for this reason it also loses legitimacy. It would be a mistake, however, to believe that only delegitimation exists. The same can be said for democratization and the modernization of civil society, which run parallel to the consolidation in some areas of antidemocratic and repressive "enclaves."

Although the situation is not black-and-white, in general the Colombian regime is deficient with regard to legitimation and democracy. A very sensitive point that makes peace unbelievable is the elimination of the leftist opposition—those who fight for social issues and defend human rights. Nevertheless, the insecurity that surrounds the population in Colombia manifests itself not only in efforts to build political alternatives but also in the very processes of articulation of interests among the popular sectors. For example, even though for 100 years the strategic role of coffee growing for the national economy has been indisputable and there is a history of at least 60 years of union organizing, the workers who make the harvest possible have never been able to organize because of repression and deception. As second-class citizens, these workers have not been able to express their concerns, much less negotiate a policy of social security. The national imaginary contains a mythical small coffee grower and even a mule but no day laborer. In the same way there are other popular sectors that need empowerment. The transformation of "quasi-groups" into "interest groups" (Dahrendorf) becomes part of democratic openness, and in this Colombia is greatly lacking. This could also be a topic of negotiations in which civil society plays a role.

## **THE GUERRILLAS SEEN FROM ABOVE AND FROM THE SIDE: RECOGNITION, REJECTION, AND RELATIVIZATION**

Considering the topic of human rights from the time of the Turbay Ayala (1978-1982) administration, a split begins to appear within the establishment that continues to this day and that constitutes an antecedent for the divergence with regard to the political negotiation of the armed conflict. There are of course many other factors that produce splits within the political elite and the sectors that hold economic power, and the representation of positions of power has also become problematic.

The sectors of the establishment that advocate negotiation are divided over political recognition of the insurgents but clearly indicate their absolute rejection of kidnapping and the connection between the guerrillas and the drug traffickers. They believe, however, that at some point they can achieve the suspension of kidnapping and the participation of the rebels in the replacement of crops. In general, they relativize the extent (or the "danger") of the guerrilla movement once it has been converted into a political force committed to playing by democratic rules. It is nevertheless evident that sectors of the power elite with a reformist and modernizing mentality accept the possibility of an increase in the political spectrum without recognizing that it becomes a zero-sum game. That corrupt and politically antiquated sectors will inevitably lose influence is something that the participants in the negotiations should accept and even consider healthy. Among other things, eliminating various battalions of immoral politicians will increase the efficiency of the entire political system. On the other hand, the struggle against corruption is something that is welcomed by the entire world, and on top of that there are fervent believers in neoliberalism who take on this task with a passion. Nor can the Colombian armed forces in this day and age avoid public scrutiny regarding human rights and subordination to civilian authority. The international environment is favorable toward both controlling public opinion and controlling the institutions themselves. In today's world, "accountability" is becoming a motto.

The armed conflict in Colombia is very acute in its manifestations of violence, but it has not developed as a true class conflict or one of national liberation (in the anticolonial or anti-imperialist sense), and for this reason programmatic elements such as agrarian reform occupy a secondary role in the daily play and counterplay of confrontation. These programs are appealed to in search of solutions to the violence. Reference to "classes" serves to explain the origins of the conflict at a very general level but cannot account for the

diverse ways in which it is reproduced. Continuation of the agrarian conflicts of the 1970s can be postulated in some regions as due to the repression of the Unión Patriótica in the 1980s and the subsequent growth of the guerrilla movement, but this interpretation of recent history leaves out the multiple dynamics that are part of this conflict—for example, the effects of actions and heavy-handed retaliations, generally in violation of human rights or international humanitarian law; processes of territorial control by the guerrillas that involve symbiosis with illegal economic structures, the appropriation of surpluses, attempts at economic consolidation of illegal crops, transfers of budgetary allocations or petroleum income to outlying municipalities, and the financial solvency of the insurgency.

Beyond assuming that social issues are a given or that they define the conflict, what is important is finding ways to reintroduce them into the negotiations between the guerrillas and the ruling parties. The relative autonomy of the insurgency front regarding the socialist movement has caused it to view the topic of negotiations strictly from a military perspective. In this respect, the contrast between the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and the FARC views of the Ejército Zapatista is very evident. As part of this military perspective, according to Bejarano (1999: 27-98), negotiation is best conducted when one or the other of the parties is on the verge of defeat, when both face catastrophe, or when there is a military stalemate. In Colombia it would take a long time and involve a lot of bloodshed before any of these situations became a reality. There is, of course, always the possibility that the protagonists will take into account factors other than the current correlation of military strength. Where there is “internal readiness” (1999: 90-91), the contending parties all recognize clear advantages to a new period of peace. The idea of “repolarization” of the conflict (Sánchez, 1998) points to the possibility of overcoming a deadlock in the conflict, and in speaking of the reintroduction of social issues we need to think about the real advantages for the insurgency and civil society in a negotiation process.

If, however, the attention of society continues to concentrate on making apologies for the effects of the waves of kidnapping and other violations of international humanitarian law by the guerrillas and it is recognized that there is no effective guarantee of a legal opposition because the state remains burdened by tolerance for the paramilitary forces, there can be no negotiations that seriously take social issues into account.

For a negotiated solution, then, it is of cardinal importance that the guerrillas conform to the definition they have of themselves. The state must also define itself, but it is evident from what we know about the latest negotiations that the insurgents are calling the shots. Though it seems paradoxical, both the participants in the dialogue in Bogotá and those in Washington need the

revolutionary guerrillas with their political vision. At the same time, the fundamentalists need the paramilitaries.

Whose side is time on? If we take into account the development of institutions at the international level, it could be said that time is short for extremist positions. The violation of human rights and international humanitarian law may from here on be subject to international tribunals. We already have experiences such as the trials in The Hague of those accused of massacres in Bosnia and the legal action against Pinochet in Spain and Britain.

Faced with the new situation for governments and societies, it may be said that critical thought in Colombia is an entering wedge. I have spoken of the development of an antielite as one characteristic of the new dialogue in Colombia. Its relative importance is shared by all the social actors in civil society who are in favor of change and have to swim against the current but trust in the future.

## REFERENCES

Archila, Mauricio

1995 "Tendencias recientes de los movimientos sociales," pp. 251-301 in Francisco Leal Buitrago (ed.), *En busca de la estabilidad perdida: Actores políticos y sociales en los años noventa*. Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores.

1996 "¿Utopía armada? Oposición política y movimientos sociales durante el Frente Nacional." *Controversia* (Bogotá) 168 (May): 25-53.

1997 "Protesta social y estado en el Frente Nacional: informe final de investigación del subproyecto 'Movimientos Sociales y Acción Colectiva en Colombia,' Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, January 1997." *Controversia* (Bogotá) 170 (May): 9-54.

1998 "Actores y conflictos sociales," pp. 163-204 in Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (ed.), *Una opción y muchas búsquedas: CINEP 25 años*. Bogotá.

Bejarano, Ana María

1994 "Recuperar el estado para fortalecer la democracia." *Análisis Político* (Bogotá) 22 (May/August): 47-79.

1995 "Para repensar las relaciones estado, sociedad civil y régimen político: una nueva mirada conceptual." *Controversia* (Bogotá) 167 (October-November): 9-32.

Bejarano, Jesús Antonio

1999 "Ensanchando el Centro: El papel de la sociedad civil en el proceso de paz," pp. 27-98 in Alonso Monsalve and Eduardo Domínguez (eds.), *Colombia: Democracia y paz*. Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia/Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana/Instituto de Filosofía del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas de España.

Cortés Rodas, Francisco

1999 "Democracia o dictadura," pp. 327-362 in Alonso Monsalve and Eduardo Domínguez (eds.), *Colombia: Democracia y paz*. Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia/Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana/Instituto de Filosofía del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas de España.



Deas, Malcolm and Fernando Gaitán

1995 *Dos ensayos especulativos sobre la violencia en Colombia*. Bogotá: FONADE DNP.

De Roux, Francisco

1987 *Los precios de la paz*. Bogotá: CINEP Occasional Documents 39.

Durán, Rosalba

1999 "Neutralidad activa de la población civil en el conflicto colombiano," pp. 363-398 in Alonso Monsalve and Eduardo Domínguez (eds.), *Colombia: Democracia y paz*. Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia/Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana/Instituto de Filosofía del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas de España.

Fals Borda, Orlando

1989 "Movimientos sociales y poder político." *Análisis Político* (Bogotá) 8 (September-December): 49-58.

1993 "Building countervailing power in Nicaragua, Mexico, and Colombia," pp. 195-217 in Ponna Wignaraja (ed.), *New Social Movements in the South*. London: Zed Books.

Freitas, Julie

1999 Declaración, March 11. <http://www.igc.org/csn>

Gaitán, Pilar

1993 "Algunas consideraciones acerca del debate sobre la democracia." *Análisis Político* (Bogotá) 20 (September-December): 47-57.

Gonzalez, Jorge I.

1998 "La investigación económica en el CINEP desde comienzos de los setenta," pp. 123-164 in Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (ed.), *Una opción y muchas búsquedas: CINEP 25 años*. Bogotá.

Grueso, Libia, Carlos Romero, and Arturo Escobar

1998 "The process of black community organizing in the southern Pacific Coast region of Colombia," pp. 196-219 in Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar (eds.), *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Revisioning Latin American Social Movements*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Hoyos Vásquez, Guillermo

1993 "Ética discursiva, derecho y democracia." *Análisis Político* (Bogotá) 20 (September-December): 5-19.

1999 "Derechos ciudadanos y para ciudadanos," pp. 299-326 in Alonso Monsalve and Eduardo Domínguez (eds.), *Colombia: Democracia y paz*. Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia/Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana/Instituto de Filosofía del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas de España.

Mockus, Atanas

1994 "Anfibios culturales y divorcio entre ley, moral y cultura." *Análisis Político* (Bogotá) 21 (January-April): 37-48.

Monsalvo, Alonso, and Eduardo Domínguez (eds.)

1999 *Colombia: Democracia y paz*. Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia/Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana/Instituto de Filosofía del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas de España.

Pécaut, Daniel

1998 "La contribución del IEPRI a los estudios de La Violencia en Colombia." *Análisis Político* (Bogotá) 34 (May-August): 71-88.

Pérez, Diego

1998 "En defensa de los derechos humanos," pp. 207-231 in Centro de Investigación Popular (ed.), *Una opción y muchas búsquedas: CINEP 25 años*. Bogotá.

Rangel, Alfredo

1998 *Colombia: Guerra en el fin de siglo*. Bogotá: Tercer Mundo/Universidad de los Andes..

Restrepo, Luis Alberto

1988a "Los movimientos sociales, la democracia y el socialismo," *Análisis Político* (Bogotá) 5 (September-December): 56-67.

1988b "Comentarios a la ponencia de Pedro Santana Rodriguez: movimientos sociales, democracia y poder local," in Nora Segura de Camacho (ed.), *Colombia: Democracia y sociedad*. Bogotá: FESCOL.

Sánchez, Gonzalo

1998 "Violencias, contrainsurgencia y sociedad civil en la Colombia contemporánea." <http://www.colombia-thema.org> No. 2.

Santana, Pedro

1988 "Movimientos sociales, democracia y poder local," in Nora Segura de Camacho (ed.), *Colombia: Democracia y sociedad*. Bogotá: FESCOL.

Villaveces, Santiago

1998 "Entre pliegues de ruinas y esperanzas: Viñetas sobre los estudios de violencia en el IEPRI." *Análisis Político* (Bogotá) 34 (May-August): 89-114.

Zuleta, Estanislao

1985(1964) "Marxismo y psicoanálisis (1964)," pp. 203-228 in Ruben Sierra (ed.), *La filosofía en Colombia (siglo XX)*. Bogotá: Procultura.