

**LANGUAGE AND POLITICS:  
ON THE COLOMBIAN “ESTABLISHMENT”\***

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## ABSTRACT

During the last decade, the term “Establishment” has gained currency among Colombian opinion makers—be they newspaper columnists, politicians, or even academics. After surveying the ambiguities of the concept in the United Kingdom and the United States—the countries where it was first popularized in the 1950s and 1960s—this paper focuses on the usages of the expression in the Colombian public debate. Based on a variety of sources—including op-eds and newspaper reports, interviews with leading public figures, and other political and academic documents—I show how generalized the term has become. I examine how the prevailing language gives the “Establishment” a central role in shaping political developments in the past decades. It blames the “Establishment” for the country’s most fundamental problems while conferring on this same “Establishment” the power to solve them. However, any attempt to identify what is meant by the “Establishment” soon reveals an extremely confusing picture. In the final part of the paper, I highlight some of the implications of the general usage of such a vague and contradictory concept for the quality of democratic debate, the legitimacy of the political system, and the possible solution of the armed conflict in Colombia.

## RESUMEN

Durante la última década, la expresión “Establecimiento” se ha vuelto de moda entre los formadores de opinión en Colombia—ya se trate de columnistas de prensa, políticos y hasta académicos—. Tras repasar las ambigüedades del término en Inglaterra y en los Estados Unidos, donde por primera vez se popularizó en los años 1950s y 1960s, este ensayo examina su uso en el debate público colombiano. Basado en una variedad de fuentes—incluyendo editoriales y artículos de periódicos, entrevistas publicadas con destacadas figuras nacionales y otros documentos políticos y académicos—, muestro cómo se ha generalizado el uso de la expresión. Examino cómo el lenguaje dominante le otorga al “Establecimiento” un papel central en la dirección de los desarrollos políticos de las décadas pasadas. Ese lenguaje culpa al “Establecimiento” por los problemas más fundamentales del país, mientras le confiere poderes a ese mismo “Establecimiento” para resolverlos. Sin embargo, cualquier intento de identificar qué se entiende por “Establecimiento” (entre quienes usan la expresión) revela pronto un confuso mensaje—como se puede comprobar en estas páginas—. En la sección final del ensayo, destaco algunas de las implicaciones del uso generalizado de tan vago y contradictorio concepto para la calidad del debate democrático, la legitimidad del sistema político, y la posible solución del conflicto armado en Colombia.



On April 2, 2000, Raul Reyes, one of the leaders of the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) referred to some of the conditions that, according to his organization, were required to reach peace in Colombia. “Peace,” he observed, “does not grow out of our wishes for peace, but peace comprises all elements, economic, social, political and cultural.” And he questioned “the political will of the government and the Establishment” to pursue the agenda for peace that he outlined.

It was not the first or the last time that a leader of the FARC included the “Establishment” as a party to the armed conflict, as the Establishment is often held responsible for all the ills of Colombia in FARC’s public rhetoric. Nor is the FARC alone in such criticism and condemnation. Indeed, references to the Establishment have become widespread.<sup>1</sup> The expression is commonly used by opinion makers, politicians, academics and entrepreneurs alike. It is also used by members of the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, or United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia), the self-defence group or paramilitary organization that opposes the guerrillas. Its usage seems to have intensified during the peace process between the government and the FARC, which lasted from 1999 to 2002. In the public debate at the time, the Establishment was frequently portrayed as a key actor in the development of both the conflict and its solution. The use of the term has been generally incorporated into the language of analysts when dealing with Colombian politics in recent years.

As the term gains currency, some questions need to be answered. How is the Colombian Establishment defined? Who is part of it? Is it a useful political concept? Does it serve to properly explain the power structure of the country? What are its implications for the process of decision making, for the way Colombians perceive their own government, for the legitimacy of the political system and for finding a negotiated settlement to the armed conflict?

In the pages that follow, I examine these and other related questions, in an attempt to show how our understanding of Colombian politics has been recently shaped, or misshaped, by powerful and overarching images and notions. The Establishment, I will argue, is one of such notions: it is a vague and all-encompassing term, but does it capture or does it distort the reality of power in Colombia? Other concepts and phrases that are

now commonplace seem to me similarly questionable: the country's "civil war;" the "illegitimacy" of the state; or the claim that there is no democratic opposition in Colombia. The very notion of "peace" tends to be defined in maximalist terms, equating "peace" with the solution of all problems.<sup>2</sup>

The analysis of the uses of these terms, like "the Establishment," pertains to a wider topic, namely looking at how issues of language impinge on political processes.<sup>3</sup> Quite apart from the political intricacies of language, the Establishment can also be of interest to those who study the composition of elites.<sup>4</sup> The aims of this paper are more modest: by looking in some detail at the use of one term—"the Establishment"—I intend to show how confused the Colombian public debate over the nature of the nation's political system and its decision-making process is. This exercise could be useful in appreciating the extent to which the power structure is misconceived, and how such a misconception may be affecting democratic developments in the country.

Some opinion makers have become increasingly aware of the problems raised by political language nowadays in Colombia. Abominable events are often described with euphemisms words are replaced to convey an apparently "more digestible social life," hiding the criminality of the action: "retention" for kidnapping, "*pesca milagrosa*" (miraculous fishing) for mass kidnapping, "*boleteo*" for extortion.<sup>5</sup>

The scholarship on this topic is nevertheless thin. However, Mauricio Rubio devoted some attention to the problem in one of the most perceptive books published on Colombian violence in the last decade, although language was not the focus of his analysis. More recently, Fernando Estrada Gallego has attempted an examination of the dynamics of the conflict through the study of the discourse of illegal armed groups. Malcolm Deas has referred to the "crisis of language" in the context of the armed conflict, while criticizing in particular the use of ill-defined concepts—such as the Establishment.<sup>6</sup> All these works give us some useful general insights but none explore in detail the meanings of one particular expression, as proposed here.

This essay offers a portrait of the so-called Colombian Establishment as shown by those who more frequently use the expression—by-and-large opinion makers in the press, who can also be classified as "public intellectuals."<sup>7</sup> I will examine some of the major features ascribed to this supposed Establishment: what sort of entity it is; why it is the

focus of so much criticism; how much power it presumably has. I will also try to identify who belongs to the Establishment in Colombia and the institutions that comprise it, again according to those who give credit to the term by using it. The reader can expect a confusing portrait of the use of a word that paradoxically is designed to simplify reality. I will conclude by highlighting some of the implications of the general use of such language, for the quality of democratic debate, for the legitimacy of the political system and for possible solutions to the armed conflict.

Before tackling the subject proper, let us look, first, at where the term comes from and what lessons are to be learned from the expression in the countries where it has at times been popular—Britain and the United States.

### **AN ELUSIVE CONCEPT**

Of course, the term “Establishment” is far from being of Colombian vintage. Nor has its use elsewhere been a model of clarity. It has entered the *New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* as “a term, usually pejorative, for an ill-defined amalgam of those institutions, social classes and forces which represent authority, legitimacy, tradition and the status quo.”<sup>8</sup>

#### **The “Establishment” in England**

The word is derived from the “established” Church of England.<sup>9</sup> A.J.P. Taylor made use of it in 1953, but its diffusion is generally attributed to Henry Fairlie, who wrote about it in *The Spectator* in 1955.<sup>10</sup> At its most basic level, the expression generally refers to a “covert ruling elite,” which in Britain has been linked to networks of people involved in particular institutions, like the monarchy, parliament, the Church of England, Oxford, Cambridge, the BBC (Britain Broadcasting Corporation) or the public schools.

Some of these institutions were the subject of individual chapters in a book edited by Hugh Thomas following a symposium in 1959.<sup>11</sup> Thomas’s view of the Establishment, however, seemed to go beyond a strict identification with those institutions. He linked it to a certain frame of mind originating in upper-crust circles of Victorian England and to those who upheld that particular frame of mind. In his own words, it indicated “the

assumption of the attributes of a state church by certain institutions and people.” The Establishment and Victorian England were one and the same; thus, Thomas suggested, “a knowledge of the character of English society in the middle of the nineteenth century” was “fundamental to an understanding of the development of the Establishment.”<sup>12</sup>

Thomas thought that, in spite of some slight differences, all contributors to his edited book agreed on his definition. Yet very few elaborated much on the concept. Among those who did, Henry Fairlie—the popularizer of the expression—might have come close to Thomas’s interpretation, although sometimes it is difficult to tell. Fairlie pointed out that the Establishment had become “a harlot of a phrase,” corrupted by “a whole tribe of professional publicists ... merely to denote those in positions of power whom they happen to dislike most.”<sup>13</sup>

The Establishment, Fairlie explained, was “not a power elite;”<sup>14</sup> the idea was “concerned less with the exercise of power than with the established bodies of prevailing opinion.” Members of the Establishment could have connections with power blocks, but those connections did not provide them with particular influence; they could represent vested interests, but they did not become a part of the Establishment because they represented those interests. Indeed, critics of the Establishment, according to Fairlie, were missing the point: “the one significant fact about the Establishment is that it represents nothing on the national life. It has its roots in no class, in no interests.”<sup>15</sup> The institution he identified as “the most powerful,” among “all the voices of the Establishment,” was the BBC.<sup>16</sup>

Other attempts at defining the Establishment in Thomas’s volume took a different view. Christopher Hollis meant by it “a body of people, acting, consciously or subconsciously, together, holding no official posts through which they exercise their power but nevertheless exercising a great influence on national policy.”<sup>17</sup> Hollis’s task was to enquire whether or not there existed such an influence acting on the life of the British parliament. He doubted it. There were different sources of power exercising influence, but whether there was “some mysterious, social influence, independent of them all, which really control our destinies,” Hollis was “less certain.” If there was such a thing as the power of the Establishment, this came “not from the fact that a dozen people impose their will on the rest of us but from the fact that there is in all of us a degree of



establishment-mindedness”—to the extent that “we feel it right” that the opinion of those who presumably belong to the Establishment “should have attention paid to them.”<sup>18</sup> Arguably here—in the notion of the Establishment as a sort of frame of mind—Hollis was on common ground with Thomas and Fairlie.

Thomas’s edited book may now be dated, but it seems a good point of departure for any attempt at understanding what was meant by the Establishment at the time the term took off. As far as I can tell, it was the first collective, systematic effort to look into the meaning of the expression, bringing together writers, academics, politicians and businessmen. It was, and still is, a revealing exercise: the word referred to some obscure forces whose definition remained by their very nature obscure. Not a single clear concept of the Establishment came out of the various chapters of the book. Its central focus was some of the most salient institutions supposedly linked to the British Establishment, but those institutions were not considered by themselves the Establishment. Given the empirical evidence, it was less than clear that an Establishment was in control of British life.

Perhaps in its skeptical way Thomas’s book was a good start, but since then scholars have tended to keep their distance from an expression that obfuscates rather than clarifies. Even journalists like Anthony Sampson, who in 1962 published his famous *Anatomy of Britain*, thought that the word “Establishment” suggested a simple vision of the power in the country.<sup>19</sup> From time to time, the term was reexamined by academics, but only to be dismissed again for its lack of explanatory value. Geraint Parry incorporated it in his 1969 study on political elites, although he thought it was “one of the most difficult of specialized elites to detect, describe and assess.”<sup>20</sup> His account of the nature of the Establishment was “impressionistic,” a mere description of a “network of contacts between certain groups of people ... maintained largely in an informal manner by membership of the London clubs, by the social round of dinners and parties as well as, more formally, in business meetings and at official events.” Yet even if this network of people could be identified, its unity was clearly questionable, while its influence on British politics was difficult to measure with any degree of certainty.<sup>21</sup>

In the end, it is the relationship with state power that matters for the Establishment to be of some pertinence, as Jean Blondel argued in another work of the

1960s. The Establishment, he wrote, was a different notion from those of the ruling class and power elite.<sup>22</sup> It was more flexible than the latter two in so far as it defined the ruling group in both socio-economic and psychological terms—by which he meant the adoption by all its members of certain attitudes.<sup>23</sup> Yet all three notions implied that important social and economic policy decisions were taken by relatively small groups, isolated from the rest of society, in secrecy, and mindful of preserving tradition. In their extreme versions, for these “theories”—as Blondel calls them—the idea of representation was a mere “sham,” and “political contests themselves [were] sham fights.”<sup>24</sup>

Blondel found major difficulties with these theories. If they were going to have any validity, they should at least comply, he argued, with three conditions. Firstly, the Establishment must be “a group in the strong sense of the word ... a community with an *esprit de corps*.” Secondly, such a group “must not be seriously challenged by other groups outside the establishment.” And thirdly, the theories depended “to a large extent on how much power the ruling group can be allowed to have.” Blondel admitted that the Establishment might exist in Britain. Yet he found it hard to identify such a group with a fully developed set of the three defining conditions—“unity of purpose,” “permanency” and “power.” The latter was perhaps the most significant. The British Establishment did not seem to have permanent power and it certainly did not monopolize it. Its “real strength” was one of “social prestige.” It gave social influence to those viewed as members of the Establishment, but they did not have “political or economic power because they [were] members of the establishment.”<sup>25</sup>

If the definition and the validity of the term were in doubt already in the 1960s, it is even less certain that nowadays, following decades of change, references to the British Establishment might have any meaningful purpose.

Public schools have not disappeared, as Thomas wished, but they have become more of a handicap than an advantage to those who aspire to reach the pinnacles of power. The same is true for degrees from Oxford and Cambridge. If the BBC is still the “voice” of the Establishment, then it is speaking for a different Establishment from that of the past. The Thatcherites could enquire, “Is he or she one of us?” but “us” was often a reference to members of a new conservative “Establishment,” which was in any case displaced from power by the Labour party in 1997. Andrew Neil, once editor of the

Sunday *Times*, defined himself as “an anti-Establishment outsider” in his 1996 autobiography, but, as Will Hutton observed, “in so far as there is now an Establishment he was one of its key members for as long as he edited the Sunday *Times*.” The paper itself was owned by another outsider, Rupert Murdoch. For the Scotsman Neil and the Australian Murdoch, their dislike of the Establishment was “a code for dislike of the English.”<sup>26</sup> “The anti-Establishment,” Anthony Sampson observed in his recently revisited anatomy of power in Britain, had become “more potent than the Establishment.” In his view, there is a “new Establishment,” drawn into politics “usually via the militant left,” and “with greater resources and stronger bonds than the old one.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The “Establishment” in the United States**

Thus first popularized in Britain, the term “Establishment” remained loosely defined and a doubtful analytical tool before it crossed the Atlantic to the United States. There it acquired another meaning, even if it preserved some of its original sins.

The expression was said to have been imported by the *National Review*. However, credit for its introduction into US public discourse is often given to Richard Rovere who, in 1962, published his “Notes on the Establishment,” commissioned by the *American Scholar*, although Rovere himself acknowledged John Kenneth Galbraith as “a pioneer in the field of Establishment studies.”<sup>28</sup>

From the start, Rovere recognized what his British counterparts had: that conceptions of the American Establishment—variably labeled as the “legitimate Mafia,” or the “Liberal Machine”—“differ greatly.” This did not mean that the Establishment did not exist. Rovere first echoed John Kenneth Galbraith’s view of it as “a rather small group of influential men who embody the best of the Conventional Wisdom and can be trusted with substantial grants of power by any responsible group in the country.”<sup>29</sup> In the revised version of his original piece, he seemed to have moved the focus of the term from the trusted holders of the “conventional wisdom” towards the holders of power “in finance, business and the professions, largely from the North-East, who hold the principal measure of power and influence in this country irrespective of what administration occupies the White House.”<sup>30</sup>

The distinction may be subtle, but it is of major significance. The latter meaning has perhaps been the most in vogue. According to Samuel Huntington, the “Establishment is predominantly East Coast, Ivy League, Wall Street, big business and executive branch oriented,” and it also included the military profession.<sup>31</sup> The American Establishment was often linked in the 1960s and 1970s to particular institutions like Brookings, the Council on Foreign Relations and the Committee for Economic Development, while the core of its doctrine was said to be the “principles and policies that have the editorial support of the *New York Times*.”<sup>32</sup>

More recently, Alan Brinkley has defined the Establishment in more narrow terms, as a “small circle of men and women who have framed American foreign policy during at least the first two decades after World War II.”<sup>33</sup> These men and women were characterized by their “privilege and self-conscious elitism,” and by an “ideological affinity that made the establishment an effective influence in public policy.” Its social cohesion was made possible by common educational background, old-school ties and shared experiences in Wall Street or in institutions like the Council on Foreign Relations.<sup>34</sup> If there was an embodiment of the Establishment “ideal,” it was Henry Stimson—“twice secretary of war, once secretary of state, a longtime Wall Street lawyer, a pillar of the elite social world of New York.” The leaders of the “Establishment” who succeeded Stimson combined his characteristics: “certitude, elitism and self-conscious integrity.”<sup>35</sup>

Brinkley recognized that the Establishment was never “the coherent entity” that both its critics and defenders claimed. In his view, it certainly had influence over American foreign policy but it was far from being the control suggested by “popular myth.” Yet, postwar American diplomacy was characterized by the intimacy of its leadership, an “intimacy, at times bordering on incestuousness.” Whatever its cohesiveness and power, Brinkley seems to suggest that the time of the Establishment had passed.

At the heart of the idea of the Establishment were some common traits in Britain and in the United States: the elitist conception of the ruling group, its unity of purpose, its nature as a hidden power. Silk and Silk suggest, however, that in crossing from Britain to the United States, the concept acquired a “distinctively American” personality. It was,

from the beginning, “a democratic Establishment, rather than an aristocratic or authoritarian one.” Its roots were “in a liberal, democratic church; tolerance and openness were and remain its dominant principles.” It contained an essential “element of voluntarism.” The Establishment, in sum, represented “the effort of many people to create a national force, outside government, dedicated to truth, liberty and, however defined, the broad public interest.”<sup>36</sup> This may not be the case, but what concerns us here is a new conceptual development, where the Establishment changes its nature as it changes nationalities.

In sum, the above review is far from comprehensive. Its main intention has been to show that from its origin the notion of the Establishment in both Britain and the United States has remained an elusive concept—“an institution which, maddeningly, seems both to exist and not exist.”<sup>37</sup> Not only there are several definitions of the term, but they tend to be unclear and imprecise about the nature and composition of the Establishment in both countries. And in both countries, the word may have different meanings, although, as acknowledged, wherever the expression is used, it often implies the existence of an elite exercising power in secrecy, beyond democratic control. Even if seemingly identifiable, scholars and publicists have also questioned the degree of unity, permanency and power of the Establishment.

We are then left with a concept whose utility to understand the structure of social power and the dynamics of political processes is indeed limited. When applied to Colombia, as I will try to show in the following section, the results are even more discouraging, given the confusion that has permeated the language of political analysts.

### **THE COLOMBIAN ESTABLISHMENT: A PORTRAIT**

We have yet to identify who played Henry Fairlie or Richard Rovere as popularizer of the term “Establishment” in Colombia and when it was imported from England or the United States.<sup>38</sup> However, during the 1990s it became a catchword in Colombia, used by a wide array of political commentators in the press and even incorporated into academic discourse.

In this section, I offer a description of the nature and identity of the Colombian Establishment through the language of those who give credit to the expression. I start by showing how the term is conceived. I then move on to outline the major criticisms of the Establishment, stressing how powerful many of its critics believe it to be. Finally, I examine who constitutes the so-called Establishment, the people or institutions that are supposedly its members.

### A Living Creature

The first thing to note when observing the nature of the Colombian Establishment as described by its critics is that it is usually treated as a living creature that behaves almost like any individual.

The Establishment apparently shares some of the functions of the human body and mind: it can “see,” and “with clarity.” It can also “breathe calmly.” And it can certainly think, although often “erroneously,” when for example it “thought that the best way of controlling public order was to pass the problem [of the armed conflict] to the *gringos*.”<sup>39</sup> Some consider the Establishment to be “intelligent.” Others prefer to highlight its “stupidity” and “frivolity.”<sup>40</sup>

Its conduct seems to be similar to that of human beings as well, but more often than not because of its “weaknesses and vices,” to the extent that it “does not have any moral authority to criticize anything.”<sup>41</sup> Like many human beings, the Establishment would be capable of “*mamar gallo*”—the expression popularized by Gabriel García Márquez to refer to the attitude of Colombians from the Caribbean region of not taking things too seriously. The Establishment nevertheless takes serious political positions, which tend to be “right wing, such extreme right that would embarrass people like Franco or Torquemada.”<sup>42</sup> The Establishment would have, therefore, traditionally despised the democratic left, against which it has acted treacherously.<sup>43</sup> Not that the left is free from criticism by all the enemies of the Establishment. “Together with the right and the left,” the poet Eduardo Escobar observes, “the Establishment forms part of the monster of three heads that has been mistreating the native population.”<sup>44</sup>

Unlike human beings, however, the Establishment does not seem to age. Descriptions of it often denote a timeless being, without much change over the years. In

the most extreme version, the Establishment has been frivolous throughout its history “since the conquest.”<sup>45</sup>

The most frequent references take its existence back to the mid-twentieth century, the period of *la Violencia* that preceded the emergence of the FARC in the 1960s. General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla’s coup in 1953 is said to have been “a first proof of political transaction within the Establishment.”<sup>46</sup> The *Nadaísmo*—an intellectual movement that came to life in 1958—has been described as a reaction of a generation that could not tolerate any longer the “nauseating smell from the Establishment.”<sup>47</sup> There are occasional mentions of the “Establishment of the times,” thus distinguishing it from that of today.<sup>48</sup> More recurrent are the statements about an Establishment that for the last four decades or so has been a leading actor in national life: an Establishment that “for half a century has been *mamando gallo* to ... the peasantry and the working class;” that “has been deceived by the guerrillas for 40 years” or that “has waited 40 years to negotiate with the guerrillas, now that the guerrillas are old.”<sup>49</sup> Note in the latter that the guerrillas have grown older, an apparent advantage for an ever young, clever and patient Establishment.

### **The Culprit for Colombia’s Ills**

Whether like a human being or part of a three-headed monster, the Establishment is often identified as having the greatest responsibility for the country’s most fundamental problems.

Accusations against it are made at a general level: it has failed to “punish corruption;” it has shown an “uninterested attitude regarding the deterioration of public order;” it has denied the existence of ethnic conflicts; it has historically failed to provide the basic necessities to the peasantry; it has accepted foreign interventionism and given away the sovereignty of the country.<sup>50</sup> Critics also denounce its direct involvement in particular events. The Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union)—the political party linked to the FARC following the peace process in the 1980s, whose members were assassinated in large numbers—is said to have been a “victim of the Establishment.”<sup>51</sup> When the protesters against the negotiations for a free-trade treaty with the United States clashed in

the streets of Cartagena with public forces in May 2004, the incident was given as evidence of the traditionally brutal way the Establishment has dealt with social differences in the country.<sup>52</sup>

Criticisms of the Establishment tend to be all-embracing: not paying attention to the problems of university education; not knowing what is going on in neighboring Venezuela; not recognizing the problem of poverty; celebrating Plan Colombia without realizing that the Establishment has to contribute to its financing; and suffering from an “identical deficit” of intellectuals to that suffered by the “armed actors.”<sup>53</sup> The influential weekly magazine *Semana* summarized what seemed to have become the standard reasons to condemn the Establishment: “for its utter failure and lack of purpose, its weakness and lack of courage, the absence of any sense of its own responsibility in the construction of the nation, the narrowness of its ambitions.”<sup>54</sup> According to Ricardo Sánchez, the Colombian Establishment is “the most selfish in Latin America, the most *apoltronado* (ensconced) in its privileges, with the shortest sight ... without any *grandeza* (magnanimity).”<sup>55</sup>

Among all the accusations, one stands out: its responsibility for the emergence and resilience of guerrilla warfare, making the Establishment, therefore, the major cause of today’s armed conflict.

The Establishment has been accused of blocking the political system during the National Front period (1958–1974) and encouraging, as a result, the “polarization” currently suffered by Colombians.<sup>56</sup> By “closing the public space and milking the state like a cow,” it “engendered the guerrilla;” it “pushed the opposition to the jungle.”<sup>57</sup> Camilo Torres, the Catholic priest who joined the ELN, took up arms because he was not allowed to use the state’s tools to “touch (or threaten) the Establishment’s interests.”<sup>58</sup> The historical reasons for the FARC’s existence are found in the behavior of an Establishment that “despised a bunch of peasant rebels,” or that “did not offer opportunities” to those who took up arms.<sup>59</sup> Guerrillas emerged—the reasoning goes on—“as a reaction of the *mamadera de gallo* by the Establishment.”<sup>60</sup>

The Establishment would not only be responsible for the rise of the guerrilla but also for the latter’s “moral” decay: “The decadence and corruption of the Establishment has affected even the guerrilla,” wrote Francisco Santos, now Colombian vice-president.



“The guerrilla increasingly resembles its arbitrariness, its lack of representativeness, its *soberbia* (arrogance) and even its lack of ideological vision.”<sup>61</sup>

A corollary of such views is that the armed conflict is interpreted as a dispute limited to just two groups: the Establishment and the guerrillas.<sup>62</sup> Even the state and the government here would become of secondary importance, never mind society at large. “Between an entrenched Establishment and a guerrilla increasingly alienated from the majority of the population,” Juan Carlos Rodríguez Raga wrote, “there lies a great proportion of Colombians, orphans of representation.”<sup>63</sup>

Of course, if the conflict is essentially confined to those two parties, the route to peace, first and foremost, cannot be anything different from an agreement between them. According to a congressional report, one of the “major obstacles for a process of negotiation is the profound lack of mutual trust between the Establishment and the guerrilla.”<sup>64</sup> Consider the definition of peace given by former Minister of Defense and current Senator Rafael Pardo: “the aim is to have an agreement between the Establishment and those who have taken arms against the system.” “The important thing is,” former Minister of Finance and ex-Rector of Andes University Rudolf Hommes noted, “that the guerrilla stops and the Establishment decides what it is going to offer.”<sup>65</sup> There were some critical voices, such as that of Ricardo Sánchez, who expressed his concern about the elitist nature of the peace process while he opposed a “peace [agreement] between two military apparatus, that of the then guerrillas and that of the Establishment.”<sup>66</sup> However, he had little doubt of the Establishment’s existence.

### **The “Establishment” in the FARC’s Discourse**

Leading members of the FARC certainly seem to believe that there is such a thing as the Colombian Establishment, nowadays the apparent central target of their struggle.

As far as I can tell, the expression has been used by FARC’s leaders since at least 1996, when guerrilla commander Alfonso Cano referred to the “responsibility for the management of the country by what has been labeled the Establishment.”<sup>67</sup> A more thorough and systematic research of FARC’s rhetoric could show exactly when the word entered into their vocabulary, but it seems that its leaders adopted the term from the

language in vogue in the public debate. Soon, “what has been labeled the Establishment” became simply “the Establishment,” as in a 1998 letter to Enrique Santos Calderón—at the time one of the most prestigious Colombian columnists and today co-director of *El Tiempo*—when Cano complained about the “*áulicos* (courtiers) of the Establishment” for whom “we are inhumans per se, who merit their condemnation.”<sup>68</sup>

During the process of negotiations with the Pastrana government, the term repeatedly appeared in FARC’s documents and in interviews with its leaders in the press. A paper by one of their “thematic commissions,” discussed during a round table in August 2001, referred to the assassination of the popular liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948, which encouraged “the people” to take up arms and “shake the foundations of the Establishment.” Popular claims for democracy, social justice, economic development and sovereignty, the document went on to observe, have traditionally been met by a bellicist attitude from the Establishment, whose “reactionary” condition and “neoliberal obsession” impeded peace in Colombia.<sup>69</sup>

For Cano, talking about the Establishment meant talking about “the most representative sectors of the Colombian state.” Other commanders of the FARC, however, conveyed the idea that the state and the Establishment were two different things, although inextricably linked. When asked by a journalist if he believed that “the Establishment was going to cede in favor of peace,” Simón Trinidad’s answer did not name representatives of the state but one of the top bankers of the country. To dismantle the paramilitaries, other leaders of the FARC suggested, “the state had to convince the Establishment.”<sup>70</sup> As I will show later, such lack of clarity in defining the Establishment is what characterizes the use of the expression among opinion makers.

Regardless of its precise identity, if the FARC was going to have peace talks, they had to be held with the Establishment. That was the view of the FARC’s top commander, Manuel Marulanda, who, watching the TV debate between Horacio Serpa and Andrés Pastrana, the two leading candidates in the 1998 presidential campaign, said of Pastrana: “that man does represent whom we want to see at the other side of the table, he is a man of the Establishment and it is with the Establishment that we want to negotiate.”<sup>71</sup> In an interview he gave shortly after the peace process was inaugurated in January 1999,

Marulanda noted that the aim of negotiating had to be the eradication of the causes that led his organization “to take up arms against the Establishment.”<sup>72</sup>

On January 8, 2002, in an attempt to keep the negotiations rolling, Marulanda wrote to James Lemoyne, UN representative in Colombia, complaining about the presence of “strong sectors within the Establishment” opposed to the possibility of change, “clinging through violence to the current regime.”<sup>73</sup> This continued to be the line after the definite breakdown of the peace process. In August 2002, when rejecting President Uribe’s proposal that the United Nations play a mediating role in the conflict, the FARC insisted that “without any will for change from the Colombian Establishment, the possibilities of bringing the armed struggle to an end are closed.”<sup>74</sup>

### **The “Establishment” and the Search for Peace**

As noted, such language—and the diagnosis it suggested—was widely shared among political analysts who, throughout the Pastrana administration (1998–2002), recurrently demanded that the so-called Establishment come to terms with the guerrillas, as if it was there that the key to the solution was. Some even believed that the Establishment had a *libreto* (script) for the occasion,<sup>75</sup> although it is hard to tell what the *libreto* consisted of.

Opinion makers did have a *libreto* for the Establishment. This included, among other demands, that the Establishment condemn those genocides that remain unpunished by the state; that it provide resources for social expenditure, redefine the state, and sign a new social compact to pursue peace; and that it lead a process of reform before the reforms are imposed by the guerrillas.<sup>76</sup>

Above all, it was demanded that the Establishment make “sacrifices” and “concessions,” although what those sacrifices and concessions would precisely consist of was not clear.

Talk of “peace costs” became common among political analysts, costs that the Establishment was apparently unwilling to meet. What was needed, as a precondition for peace, the argument went on, was an agreement within the Establishment around substantial reforms: Without such an agreement, “sacrificing” what the Establishment

“should sacrifice, the war will not end.”<sup>77</sup> Public dignitaries like the Contralor General de la República, Carlos Ossa, shared such views.<sup>78</sup> Journalists popularized it even further. “What is the Establishment prepared to give away in order to achieve peace?” Roberto Pombo, then co-director of *Cambio*, asked. For some, like Antonio Caballero, the most widely read Colombian columnist, the answer was simple: “The Establishment pretends that everything works out for free, and in addition profitably. It does not want to spend a penny on peace. They are not going to fight the war, nor will their children interrupt their business studies in US universities.”<sup>79</sup>

Whatever the answer, the assumption was that the Establishment’s attitude would determine the guerrilla’s decision to give up the armed struggle. In the words of “D’Artagnan,” a leading columnist in *El Tiempo*, “If the Establishment does not shake itself up, and its most important members do not renounce their privileges and perks which definitely discriminate against the rest of society, it is difficult to see how there is any moral authority to demand that the guerrillas free themselves from their subversive outbreaks.”<sup>80</sup>

As the peace process went nowhere and the final crisis unfolded leading to the collapse of negotiations on February 20, 2002, the use of the term and the pressure upon the so-called Establishment from opinion makers seem to have intensified.

In what appeared to be an attempt to compel one of the parties at the negotiating table to come to its senses, influential columnists like Daniel Samper begged “the Establishment to understand that problems of public order to a large extent ... had their origins in the inequality and conditions of misery, oppression and backwardness of the Colombian people.” Since there was “no real threat of revolution,” Hernando Gómez Buendía—a leading political analyst and former General Secretary of the Liberal Party—argued, the Establishment was “not prepared to negotiate anything of substance.” Even those who usually favor a hard line towards the guerrillas, like former Vice-President Carlos Lemos Simmonds, also used the expression.<sup>81</sup> According to Gabriel Silva, former ambassador to the US and currently the head of the coffee producer’s association, Fedecafé, the internal war has lasted so long “precisely because the Establishment has opted for short-term gains and middle-of-the-road stability instead of the required sacrifices for a definite solution.” Economist Javier Fernández Riva warned of further

dangers to come from the plans of the FARC facing an “*acobardado* (unnerved) Establishment.”<sup>82</sup>

There were words of condemnation for the FARC, but equal or even more responsibility was assigned to President Pastrana for his failure “to lead a negotiation inside the Establishment to clarify what it is prepared to give in exchange for [the end of] war.” The idea was reiterated again and again: as former Minister of Communication Armando Benedetti Jimeno put it, “we are left with the uncomfortable certainty that within the Establishment there exists the naïve and false impression that peace is free.”<sup>83</sup> On January 12, 2002, a group of public intellectuals signed an open letter calling for the rectification of the peace process, which required the “Establishment to recognize its patriotic duty of accepting democratic reforms, of making the investment that millions of dispossessed Colombians demand.”<sup>84</sup>

One of the harshest criticisms of the Establishment during those days of January and February 2002 came from *El Tiempo*, the leading Colombian daily. *El Tiempo* made it clear that it had supported a negotiated settlement throughout the forty months of the peace process, “in spite of the official strategy, the *paquidermia* (pachyderms) of the Establishment and the increasing *soberbia* (arrogance) of the FARC.” In its view, the Colombian Establishment was as responsible for the war as the guerrillas and paramilitaries were, but, unlike the others, the Establishment had “in its hands the legal means to make the country more just and democratic.” However, the Establishment had been incapable of stopping the spread of violence, from both left and right wing quarters; it had “preferred to look the other way when issues of misery and landless peasants were raised.” With or without negotiations, the Establishment “was late in the fulfillment of its commitments (*está en mora de darse la pela*);” it should “take into account how many times it had conned the country and pursue firmly, and without further delays, an ambitious agenda of profound reforms that this country is crying for.” It is hard to find a stronger language of condemnation: “The Colombian Establishment,” *El Tiempo* concluded, “that for so many years has not seen beyond its belly button ought to put its hand inside its pocket. Inside, it will find not only money. It will also find the origins of the legitimacy it lacks.”<sup>85</sup>

In trying to interpret the mounting conflict amidst the crisis, political leaders also resorted to the use of the word. Former President Alfonso López Michelsen, while suggesting that one ought to “think in different terms,” could not avoid a reference to a “frightened and confused Establishment.” Senator Pardo, in turn, speculated about the possibility of terrorist actions by the FARC “against the symbolic power of the oligarchy to bring pressure upon the Establishment towards a negotiated settlement.”<sup>86</sup>

The Establishment continued to figure prominently in the language of opinion makers during the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the peace process.

“We have to support the institutions,” columnist and former head of the Security Service of Colombia (Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, or DAS) Ramiro Bejarano pointed out, “because what is at stake is the survival of the Establishment.”<sup>87</sup> Gabriel Silva expressed his concern that, although it was true that the people were not supporting the FARC, they were not backing the Establishment either.<sup>88</sup> Others took the occasion to reiterate their long-standing recriminations: “things will only change when the Establishment finally realizes that its diagnosis for the illness is wrong.”<sup>89</sup> Juan Lozano—then a columnist, but currently a close advisor to President Uribe—thought that “now that the dialogue with the FARC is over, the Colombian Establishment has the obligation to promote by itself the profound changes that, in theory, were going to be discussed at [the negotiating table].” There was a plea for unity from Felipe Zuleta, former head of the state TV agency, Inravisión, who regretted the internal fights within “the so-called Establishment while we are at war.”<sup>90</sup> “We have all been involved in a prolonged act of foolishness” was the final verdict of Rudolf Hommes: “all” meant “the government, the Establishment, the majority of public opinion, the Nuncio, the United States.”<sup>91</sup>

### **Who is “In” and Who is “Out”?**

Given the features that apparently characterize the Colombian Establishment, and in particular its responsibility for the country’s most serious problems, its mighty powers, and its overwhelming protagonism, it could be assumed that its identity has been clearly and unanimously defined. How then is the Colombian Establishment constituted? Who are its members? Where exactly can we locate it?

Any serious attempt at trying to identify the Colombian Establishment in the discourse of political analysts would have to overcome, first, the difficulty of a messy language that describes its nature as diverse and heterogeneous. Those who use the term sometimes add a qualifying adjective, suggestive of not one but of various Establishments: we can come across an “urban” (or are there a number of urban Establishments?) but also a “*Bogotano* Establishment,” an “intellectual” and a “political” but also a “*politiquero* (petty politician) Establishment.” And there is a “capitalist Establishment.”<sup>92</sup> In addition, we can come across a “military establishment,” although used in reference to the military the term has perhaps a different connotation.<sup>93</sup>

Critics sometimes explicitly acknowledge that the Establishment is far from being homogeneous. There are at least “reactionary” and “enlightened” sectors within the Establishment.<sup>94</sup> After the new constitution was adopted in 1991, in the words of the poet and essayist William Ospina, “it would be unjust not to recognize the efforts among some sectors of the Establishment to build a modern, participatory and pluralist democracy” in Colombia.<sup>95</sup>

Yet the Establishment is often criticized precisely because of its fragmentation: as a result of it being fragmented it has failed to produce a unified vision for the country.<sup>96</sup> Regarding the peace process undertaken by the Pastrana administration, for example, there were—according to Alfredo Molano—three different conceptions of how to negotiate with the guerrillas within the Establishment.<sup>97</sup> Whatever support—in whatever form—Pastrana had from all those quarters for the peace process, it was weakened after the resignation of his minister of defense, Rodrigo Lloreda, who was said to be a figure respected by the Establishment, even its representative in Pastrana’s cabinet.<sup>98</sup>

Either fragmented or unified, the Establishment also seem to have produced its own rebels. Antonio Caballero claims to have been born “*en su propio seno*” (in its very heart), where he has always lived. He helped to set up and produce *Alternativa*, a weekly magazine of socialist tendency published during the 1970s and 1980s, perhaps the most significant anti-Establishment newspaper in contemporary Colombia, edited by “member rebels of the Establishment.”<sup>99</sup> Ingrid Betancourt, the presidential candidate kidnapped by the FARC in 2002, has also been described as “a rebel woman who broke with the

Establishment.”<sup>100</sup> Whether or not Ingrid Betancourt belongs to the same Establishment that Caballero has in mind remains an open question.

For what becomes increasingly clear as we move on to the examination of the term is how vague and ill-defined “the Colombian Establishment” is. “The Establishment is not monolithic,” Hernando Gómez Buendía recognizes, but only to further confuse an already confused picture: “it includes,” he adds, “a wide range of perceptions, theories, prejudices and interests, from Enrique Gómez [a conservative senator, son of former president Laureano Gómez, brother of the assassinated conservative leader Alvaro Gómez Hurtado] to Argelino Garzón [a former union leader, now governor of Valle del Cauca], to the army generals or the NGOs.”<sup>101</sup>

This sort of confusion can be further illustrated by looking at various other ways the expression is used or at the explicit attempts to define it. The latter are not frequent and when we learn what those who use the term mean by it, we are often left with a wide-embracing word, by and large equated with political power.

In his recent examination of the territorial debate, former Minister of the Interior Jaime Castro made references to the Establishment—“that is to say,” he went on to explain, “the Government, Congress, the traditional political parties, and the new political organizations.”<sup>102</sup> Similarly, for Vera Grabe, senator and a former member of the M-19, the Establishment was the name for the state and the parties but also for the media.<sup>103</sup> A leading article from *El Tiempo* offered a wider definition: the Establishment comprised the “parties, *gremios* (business associations), institutions and people that have had ... the leading voice in politics and economics.”<sup>104</sup>

The state—almost inevitably an illegitimate state—is sometimes described as representing the Establishment.<sup>105</sup> Not all state institutions, however, are included in such a notion. The armed forces, for example, are said to differ from the Establishment, whose interests and those of the military would not coincide.<sup>106</sup> That the two were distinct entities was clearly expressed by columnist María Isabel Rueda in 1999, after a few army generals were asked by the government to submit their resignation: “The army,” Rueda noted, “has never been treated so harshly by the Establishment.”<sup>107</sup>

It could be inferred from Rueda’s comments, as from other texts, that “the Establishment” was just another term to refer to the government.<sup>108</sup> But other comments



distinguish both entities. During the Pastrana administration, the government was criticized for negotiating with the guerrillas “before negotiating with the Establishment” and for “humiliating those in the Establishment who disagree with the president.”<sup>109</sup> Victor G. Ricardo, Pastrana’s High Commissioner for Peace, was said not to pay “any attention to the forces of the Establishment.”<sup>110</sup> According to Senator Pardo, there were two opposing views regarding the negotiations Pastrana launched with the FARC: that of the government and that of the Establishment.<sup>111</sup> Pastrana, noted Molano, was “cornered by the fear of the Establishment to sign a peace agreement.”<sup>112</sup>

Names of presidents and former presidents are among the most recurrent in the language of the Establishment. Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953–57), Alfonso López Michelsen (1974–78) and Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002) have been described as men who emerged from its “*entrañas*” (core).<sup>113</sup> Cesar Gaviria (1990–94) and Alvaro Uribe (2002–present) have also been referred to as part of the Establishment. Sometimes they are said to lead the Establishment, but others maintain their role is confined to that of being its “representatives or spokesmen.”<sup>114</sup>

Presidents and former presidents may be included in what Roberto Pombo called “the politicians of the Establishment.”<sup>115</sup> This is, however, of little help. Not all politicians, even some with highly influential positions, seem to qualify for membership in the club, in spite of claims that “the traditional (political) parties have embodied the Establishment.”<sup>116</sup> On the contrary. When *Semana* gave examples of the “best representatives of the Establishment,” the magazine singled out the names of Alvaro Uribe Vélez, Enrique Peñaloza, Germán Vargas, Rafael Pardo, Francisco Lloreda, and Guido Nule, an apparent new breed of politicians distinguishable from “discredited traditional politicians,” whom the magazine referred to as “the Names and the Santofimios” (once prominent surnames in Congress). *Semana* ventured a hard-to-grasp distinction between “*clase dirigente nacional*” (national ruling class) and “*clase política tradicional*” (traditional political class).<sup>117</sup> To add to our confusion, other analysts have also distinguished the Establishment from the “*dirigencia tradicional*” (traditional rulers).<sup>118</sup>

Facing such contradictions, one way to get closer to a definition of the Establishment may be by way of exclusion.

Antanas Mockus, for example, is said to have won the 2000 Bogotá mayoral election without Establishment antecedents: in Bogotá a vote for him was a vote against the Establishment. Similarly, the election of an indigenous leader, Floro Tumbalá, as governor of Cauca was considered another vote against the Establishment.<sup>119</sup> More recently, Luis Garzón, the leader of the newly formed left-wing party *Polo Democrático Independiente* (*Independent Democratic Pole*, or PDI) and currently the elected mayor of Bogotá, has been described as a man of the people, as opposed to Establishment man, and a possible mediator between the guerrillas and the Establishment.<sup>120</sup> There are also examples of self-exclusion, like former presidential candidate Horacio Serpa,<sup>121</sup> or Senator Piedad Córdoba, who considers that she is not very much “loved by the Establishment.”<sup>122</sup>

Such exercise may be of some help but not much. For a start, some of the examples are troublesome, if the definition of the Establishment includes those who occupy command and leadership positions in the government, in one of the state branches of power or in the political parties. Córdoba, a senator, has also been a member of the *Dirección Nacional Liberal* (Liberal National Directorship). More significantly, some of the examples given above suggest that government and Establishment are not the same, while contradicting the picture of an ever-powerful Establishment. If such an Establishment exists, it has lost control of Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, at least since 1994, the first time Antanas Mockus was elected its mayor.

Perhaps no other case serves to illustrate better the confusion created by the use of the term than that of Horacio Serpa. His successful and ascending public career has made him general prosecutor, senator, co-president of the National Constituent Assembly, minister of the interior, leader of the liberal party and ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS), among other leading positions in power. Such a collection of notable posts is despised by some of his political enemies, who accuse him of being one of the “faces of the decadent Establishment.”<sup>123</sup> Yet Serpa does not consider himself to be a member of that exclusive institution. “The Establishment will never allow me to be President ... [it] has always rejected me,” he said following his defeat as a presidential candidate in 2002.<sup>124</sup> “Blame it on yourself,” was the reply of the director of *Cambio*, Mauricio Vargas, who claimed that Serpa did count on the support of the political and

economic Establishments, by which he meant some of the “discredited traditional politicians” mentioned above, plus a former top executive from the private sector.<sup>125</sup> Surely Serpa and Vargas had different Establishments in mind.

Although there are a few references to the “economic Establishment,” names of representatives of the private sector do not figure prominently when the term is used. As already noted, some of the explicit attempts at defining it do include the *gremios*, or indeed specific individuals like Nicanor Restrepo, an Antioqueño entrepreneur, who has been described as “one of the most representative symbols of the Establishment.”<sup>126</sup> Occasionally, the so-called “grupo de los Cacaos”—the name given in recent years to the heads of the most powerful economic conglomerates—has been equated with “the capitalist Establishment.”<sup>127</sup> Some private sector leaders have themselves made use of the expression but it is not clear what they mean by it.<sup>128</sup> And the Establishment has sometimes been identified with the executives of the major private companies, whose children study business in US universities.<sup>129</sup> It may well be that those who distinguish the government and the state from the Establishment mean by the latter the most powerful members of the economic elite, but this is hardly made clear in the documentation consulted here.

Other definitions and examples of representatives of the Establishment would add more complications. The drug mafia is also said to be either in alliance with or “part of the Establishment.”<sup>130</sup> There are references as well to the “para-Establishment of guerrillas and paramilitaries.”<sup>131</sup> Definitions of the Establishment even include “the middle classes.”<sup>132</sup>

One of the few things that emerge with some clarity from this confusing scenario is the absence of self-consciousness and esprit de corps within the so-called Colombian Establishment.

With the notable exception of rebels like Antonio Caballero and a few other individuals—like former President López Michelsen and Felipe Zuleta, the grandson of the liberal statesman Alberto Lleras Camargo—no one seems to acknowledge membership in an institution whose existence very few appear to doubt. Far from it; some

of the figures identified in the public discourse with the Establishment either try to distance themselves from it or join its critics.

Consider the example of Noemí Sanín, former minister, ambassador to the UK, current ambassador to Spain and twice presidential candidate. Sanín has been described as the “darling of the Establishment” or simply as one of its “heads.”<sup>133</sup> To her political enemies during the 2002 presidential campaign, she was one of the “three faces of the decadent Establishment” (the other two were Serpa and Uribe).<sup>134</sup> Nonetheless, she complained about the “unanimity of the Establishment” around Uribe’s candidacy, while warning “the Establishment ... that [she was] not going to perpetuate [its] privileges.”<sup>135</sup> According to Oscar Collazos, Sanín was suffering “the dilemma of how to separate herself from the Establishment without creating alarm.”<sup>136</sup>

Sanín has not been on her own. Alvaro Gómez Hurtado—once the powerful leader of the conservative party—was, according to a former guerrilla, “the most clear expression of the most traditional Establishment.”<sup>137</sup> Nonetheless, he has also been considered a “headache” for the Establishment. Gómez Hurtado himself was of the view that “the bankruptcy of the Establishment is the largest of all times and its capacity for corruption [is] frightening.”<sup>138</sup> Alvaro Leyva—another conservative politician, once described as “a man of the Establishment”—apparently gained the trust of the FARC following a meeting during which he agreed “more with the FARC than ... [with] the Establishment.”<sup>139</sup> The entrepreneur Pedro Gómez Barrero, who at some point represented the Pastrana administration in the negotiations with the FARC, is reported to have expressed his regrets about “belonging to the Establishment.”<sup>140</sup>

*Semana* called Francisco Santos “one of the most conspicuous representatives of the *Bogotano* Establishment.”<sup>141</sup> Yet Santos’s column in *El Tiempo*, as shown here, has been severely critical of that Establishment he presumably belongs to. Indeed, *Semana* and *El Tiempo* are supposed to be newspapers of the Establishment, but it is in their pages that the Establishment is often the target of the harshest criticism.

## IMPLICATIONS

Exposing the flaws of the term “Establishment” may be at times an amusing exercise, but the term’s common acceptance in Colombia has serious implications: for

our understanding of the workings of its political system, for questions of democratic accountability, for the legitimacy of the regime, for the settlement of the armed conflict, and for the quality of political analysis and scholarship.

Firstly, the word Establishment simplifies and even distorts the nature of power in Colombia. A detailed analysis of the power structure and composition of the country's elite is beyond the purposes of this paper. Suffice it to say that, since the introduction of elections of city mayors in 1986, there has been a substantial change in the dynamics of power, made even more complex after the adoption of a new constitution in 1991:<sup>142</sup> the executive lost power to Congress; there is a new autonomous central bank and a new independent Constitutional Court; congressmen and political leaders in general are more accountable today than in the past; departmental governors are now elected instead of being appointed; indeed the two-party system as we knew it has ceased to exist. Arguably, there has always been more social mobility and therefore rotation among the Colombian political elite than critics of the system are prepared to accept. In the past two decades, however, those changes have been remarkable. The so-called "traditional political class" was displaced from power in at least the four most important capital cities—Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Barranquilla—where the bulk of the country's population lives.

Secondly, blaming the Establishment for all Colombian problems tends to free those in power from their responsibilities. Since the debate focuses attention on a mysterious entity on whose identity there is no consensus, power holders can hide from public scrutiny. Little effort is made to place responsibility where it matters: on particular ministries or governors, on individual members of parliament, or on the various policies pursued by different administrations. As some of those who often use the term are themselves powerful and privileged people, these are self-exculpatory critics. The Establishment has become an easy expedient to avoid democratic accountability.

Thirdly, the widespread notion of an Establishment—an obscure and hidden but over-arching force where the 'real' source of power lies—encourages the idea that democracy in Colombia is a pure sham. This of course delegitimizes the state and the government, feeding notions of mistrust towards democratic institutions and decisionmakers. The problem is more acute since people in government or from power

circles, including those elected by the popular vote, appear to have given full credit to the term: the democratic credentials of the state are significantly undermined by those occupying leading positions in society.<sup>143</sup>

Fourthly, the use of the term also has implications for the search for a solution to the armed conflict. As shown in this paper, members of the FARC have embraced the word Establishment as part and parcel of their discourse. The emerging fashionable expression fitted in well with the guerrilla's anti-capitalist rhetoric. After all, if there is one idea conveyed by it, it is the existence of a small and well-knit group of people taking key social decisions beyond any democratic control. The supposed existence of such an Establishment serves as a justification for their insurrection. Whether or not the guerrillas believe in its existence is a matter that should deserve more serious attention. For if belief about the Establishment prevails among the guerrillas, they would also assume that any possible negotiation to end the conflict would only require a simple agreement with a clique of powerful individuals—which is not only far from the Colombian reality but conducive to undemocratic ways of reaching a settlement.<sup>144</sup> By repeatedly using the term “Establishment,” political analysts and even central power holders may be reinforcing—unwittingly—false conceptions among guerrilla leaders, detrimental to any attempt to find a solution to the armed conflict.

Finally, the extended use of the word Establishment is a sign of intellectual confusion and laziness. Its slippage into academic language is a cause for concern. A term whose meaning is not only imprecise but contradictory should be received with skepticism by those who should know better.

## CONCLUSION

Nowadays it is not infrequent to come across the term “Establishment” elsewhere, casually used, as in the autobiography of the Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater, or in the writings of the Czech leader Vaclav Havel.<sup>145</sup> In England and the United States, where the word originally took off in the 1950s, it was given some consideration as a sub-category of “elites” in academic circles, but in a limited way, and it was soon left as a colloquial and almost meaningless expression used by some journalists. What seems

striking in the Colombian case, as amply demonstrated in this essay, is its recurrent and generalized use during the last decade.

Academics and journalists, politicians and entrepreneurs, all sorts of leaders in the public opinion debate have incorporated the term “Establishment” in their views and analysis of Colombia. Even President Uribe has referred at least once to the Establishment.<sup>146</sup> It is important to note the wide spectrum—political and professional—of those who repeatedly use the word: the Establishment seems to be equally present in the language of the FARC, leaders of the various parties (Conservative, Liberal or PDI), former presidents and cabinet ministers, entrepreneurs, newspaper columnists, university teachers, in sum, opinion makers from all ideological persuasions. It should not be surprising therefore to discover that outside Colombia—among journalists, diplomats and academics—the word has also slipped into the vocabulary, as I have been able to observe in my occasional readings of the *New York Times*, the *Economist* or *El País*.<sup>147</sup>

Such generalized acceptance of the term would imply that the Colombian Establishment is an easily identifiable being. Far from it. Like when it was in vogue in England and in the US, the word tends to mean different things to different people. Yet in both England and the US, the concept, for all its vagueness and equivocal nature, often referred rightly or wrongly to some concrete institutions or social groups—be it the BBC or the selected circle of US foreign policymakers. Definitions of the Colombian Establishment are extreme in their vagueness and even contradictory.

Some commentators, in desperation, do recognize the difficulties they encounter in conveying what they mean by the word, as when Roberto Pombo singled out “the Establishment, the state, the leading class (*clase dirigente*) or whatever you may want to call power in the last half century.”<sup>148</sup> Equating the Establishment with power does not tell us much. The state and the *clase dirigente* are really two different concepts: identifying the Establishment with both of them is not helpful either to locate power with some degree of precision or to demand accountability from those who exercise it.<sup>149</sup>

For the term to have some analytical value, we should be able to identify a “well-defined group,” which fulfills the conditions that Jean Blondel found wanting in the so-called British Establishment: “unity of purpose,” “permanency,” and “power.”<sup>150</sup> As I have shown here, no “well-defined group” emerges in the use of the expression in

Colombia. Those who do use it even recognize that such an Establishment lacks cohesiveness. The “self-conscious elitism” and proud sense of belonging that Alan Brinkley saw in the behavior of the likes of Henry Stimson in the “American Establishment” are absent from the Colombian landscape. The “permanency” of the Colombian Establishment is taken for granted among those who use the term, sometimes dating back to independence but more frequently since the mid-twentieth-century. This claim is never supported by any empirical evidence.

It seems curious that the term gained currency at a time when the power structure of Colombia has been undergoing significant transformation—acquiring more complexity. It seems even more curious that the usage of the word intensified during the negotiations with the FARC, when important sectors of public opinion felt that those who ruled were losing control of the country. There is a paradox here that is hard to understand: in the face of an apparent power vacuum, perhaps feeling the need for the exercise of authority, political analysts, while criticizing it, were in fact demanding the presence of an Establishment.

That critics of the political system make use of the word is, of course, understandable. It is, however, puzzling that so many leading members of the upper social and political circles have also adopted the term, using it often in the same critical sense as its enemies. Part of the explanation may lie in the long-rooted tradition of an anti-oligarchical discourse among politicians in Colombia, where the word Establishment might have just replaced oligarchy.<sup>151</sup> There are other interpretations. Mauricio Rubio has suggested that the insurgency was triumphant in imposing its discourse on the elites.<sup>152</sup> Although in the particular case of the “Establishment” it would seem that the FARC adopted the word after it became fashionable in elite circles, it served well to justify FARC’s cause. More significantly, the use of the term “Establishment” by members of the elites could be interpreted as another manifestation of a crisis of self-delegitimation that has affected the Colombian political system since the 1980s.<sup>153</sup>

The “poor quality of public discussion in contemporary democracies” has been the subject of some academic concern—what Jeffrey C. Goldfarb refers to as “a *deliberation deficit*.”<sup>154</sup> If such is the case elsewhere, we could perhaps interpret the vulgarization of words like the Establishment in Colombia as just another example of the



poverty of democratic debate. Nonetheless, the problem here is deeper, as the country has been immersed in a long and serious crisis, in an extraordinary atmosphere of terror. Terror, it is well known, creates confusion.<sup>155</sup> In such times of crisis, as Malcolm Deas has observed, “people seek orientation. If they do not find it, they start to believe in ghosts of threats or ghosts of solutions. This requires a minimum of lucidity among opinion makers.”<sup>156</sup> Certainly no lucid picture emerges from the portraits we are given of the Colombian Establishment.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> More often than not the term is expressed in Spanish—*Establecimiento*, sometimes in quotation marks. Occasionally it is expressed in English. For purposes of standardization in this paper, I will be referring to the “Establishment.”

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed some of these concepts and expressions in “La crisis política como crisis intelectual,” in *El Ancora* (various authors), *¿Qué está pasando en Colombia? Anatomía de un país en crisis* (Bogotá, 2000); *¿Guerra civil? El lenguaje del conflicto en Colombia* (Bogotá, 2001); “*Ilegitimidad*” del estado en Colombia. *Sobre los abusos de un concepto* (Bogotá, 2003). For a discussion of the notion of “civil war,” see William Ramírez, “¿Guerra civil en Colombia?,” and Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, “Colombia: ¿guerra civil, guerra contra la sociedad, guerra antiterrorista o guerra ambigua?” in *Análisis Político* 46 (May/August 2002), pp. 151–180; and the debate with Eric Lair, Carlos Nasi and William Ramírez participating, in *Revista de Estudios Sociales* (February 2003), pp. 119–126.

<sup>3</sup> Part of the current academic interest in this area is based on the work of the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci. See Peter Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (London, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Some of the most important classical studies on elites do not refer to the Establishment, as they were published before the term became fashionable. See, for example, C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford, 2000, first published in 1956). For a good summary of the various approaches towards elites, see Geraint Parry, *Political Elites* (London, 1969), who, in an exception to the rule, includes a brief section to discuss the term “Establishment.” See also Tom Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (London, 1993, first published in 1964), and Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique* (London, 1980), chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Antonio Panesso Robledo, “La guerra de las palabras,” *El Espectador*, July 13, 2001; and Héctor Abad Faciolince, “La condena del eufemismo,” *Cambio*, June 10, 2001. Some of those who denounce the confusing war of words in Colombia do not help much, in this respect, to enlighten the debate. “The crisis of the peace process cannot be understood from the perspective of language,” Armando Benedetti Jimeno, a former minister, has observed, while according to the columnist and writer Oscar Collazos, many words are lost in a “denaturalized grammar.” Yet both of them have helped to popularize the expression that is the subject of criticism in this paper. See Benedetti Jimeno, “Palabras sin sentido,” *El Tiempo*, July 5, 2001, and Collazos, “Palabras sucias de la guerra,” *El Tiempo*, January 13, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Mauricio Rubio, *Crimen e impunidad. Precisiones sobre la violencia* (Bogotá, 1999); Fernando Estrada Gallego, *Las metáforas de una guerra perpetua. Estudios sobre pragmática del discurso en el conflicto armado colombiano* (Bogotá, 2004); Malcolm Deas, “La paz: entre los principios y la práctica,” in Francisco Leal Buitrago, ed., *Los laberintos de la guerra. Utopías e incertidumbres sobre la paz* (Bogotá, 1999), p. 132, and his “Una isla rodeada de consejos,” *Cambio*, January 27, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> I borrow the expression from Richard A. Posner, *Public Intellectuals. A Study of Decline* (Cambridge, MA, 2003). My use of the term “intellectual” is perhaps more inclusive than Posner’s, who is mostly concerned with academic intellectuals. I have in mind opinion makers, or a variety of people who regularly write op-eds for the press: academics, journalists, writers and leading politicians. Thus, a large portion of my sources here are from the leading national and regional dailies and weekly magazines: *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, *El Colombiano*, *El Heraldo*, *El País*, *Semana* and *Cambio*. I have mostly consulted their online editions, though occasionally my material comes from their print editions. For reference purposes, I have given the name of the newspaper as it appears in the print edition, except when the article has only been published online. The term “Establishment” has also entered the language of academic texts, as this paper will show.

<sup>8</sup> Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley, eds., *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London, 2000), pp. 283–84.

<sup>9</sup> “When the ‘establishment’ of the Church of England is spoken of, we are merely making use of a conveniently compendious word by which to describe the aggregate of those special privileges which it enjoys and those special limitations to which it is subject in regard to the law,” in Harry Bevir Vaisey, *“Establishment”*: *A Plea for its Continuance* (London, 1930), p. 9. However, Vaisey also observes that “Seldom has a less appropriate expression been coined than that which is applied to the Church of England when it is said to be ‘as by law established’... for at no time, in no sense of the word, has the Church been ‘established’ by any law or laws” (ibid).

<sup>10</sup> Taylor’s article was published in *The New Statesman and Nation*, April 19, 1953, quoted in Leonard Silk and Mark Silk, *The American Establishment* (New York, 1980), pp. 6–7; and Bullock and Trombley, eds., *The New Fontana Dictionary*.

<sup>11</sup> See Hugh Thomas, ed., *The Establishment: A Symposium* (London, 1959). See also *The New Fontana Dictionary*.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, “The Establishment and Society,” in Thomas, ed., *The Establishment*, pp. 14, 15, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Fairlie, “The BBC,” in Thomas, ed., *The Establishment*, p. 202.

<sup>14</sup> Though he did not make it explicit, he was probably referring to Mill’s “Power Elite,” by which Mills generally meant those who occupied command posts in the top political, economic and military institutions. See Mills, *The Power Elite*, especially chapter 1.

<sup>15</sup> Fairlie, “The BBC,” pp. 202–203.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Hollis, “Parliament and the Establishment,” in Thomas, ed., *The Establishment*, p. 171.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 180, 181, 187.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain* (London, 1962), p. 624.

<sup>20</sup> Parry, *Political Elites*, p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Parry, *Political Elites*, p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> For the notion of the power elite, see Mills, *The Power Elite*. For a valuable collection of essays critically examining Mill’s work, see G. William Domhoff and Hoyt B. Ballard, eds., *C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite* (Boston, 1969). For the distinction between power elite and ruling class, see in particular the chapters by Paul M. Sweezy and Daniel Bell.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Blondel, *Voters, Parties and Leaders: The Social Fabric of British Politics* (Middlesex, 1965), p. 234.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 237, 243–45, 249.

<sup>26</sup> Will Hutton, “Babel,” *Prospect* (December 1996), p. 79.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Sampson, *Who Runs this Place? The Anatomy of Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London, 2005), pp. 98, 357.

<sup>28</sup> Rovere himself gave credit to the *National Review* for having “done the most to give” the term “American currency.” See Richard Rovere, “Notes on the Establishment in America,” *The American Scholar* vol. 30 (1961), p. 489. Rovere’s piece was reprinted in Richard Rovere, *The American Establishment and Other Reports, Opinions and Speculations* (London, 1963). Unless otherwise indicated, my citations of Rovere come from his original piece in *The American Scholar*. See also Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and its Discontents* (Harvard, 1988), pp. 164 and 346, note 1.

<sup>29</sup> Rovere, “Notes on the Establishment,” p. 489.

<sup>30</sup> Rovere, *The American Establishment*, p. 235.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Huntington, “Power, Expertise and the Military Profession,” *Daedalus* (Autumn, 1963), p. 803.

<sup>32</sup> See Rovere, “Notes on the Establishment,” p. 492; Silk and Silk, *The American Establishment*, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Brinkley, *Liberalism and its Discontents*, p. 164.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 165. Note the following view of the “foreign policy Establishment,” defined “not by sociology or education, and still less by genealogy, but by history, a policy, an inspiration, an instinct, a technique, a dogma,” Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time* (New York, 1976), p. 115.

<sup>35</sup> Brinkley, *Liberalism and its Discontents*, pp. 166 and 177.

<sup>36</sup> Silk and Silk, *The American Establishment*, pp. 18–20. The idea of a “liberal Establishment” may be surprising to some, but Anthony Sampson also suggested that such was the character of the British Establishment: the old “Establishment” had, in his view, “a more interesting and benign meaning: a network of liberal-minded people who could counteract the excess of autocratic and short-sighted governments,” in Sampson, *Who Runs This Place?*, p. 354.

<sup>37</sup> Silk and Silk, *The American Establishment*, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> The earliest reference I have been able to trace dates back to 1972, by former President Alberto Lleras Camargo in an article published in *Visión*, September 9, 1972, reprinted in Lleras Camargo, *Obras selectas. El Intelectual* (Bogotá, 1987), vol V, pp. 158–160. He used the term again in another *Visión* article, on July 15, 1977, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 365. On both occasions, however, he did not use the expression in reference to Colombia, but to France and the United States. He did talk about a “threatened establishment” in Colombia in a speech delivered at the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País in 1981, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 266–67. Further early references are in Fernando Cepeda Ulloa, “Por qué sobrevive la democracia colombiana?” *Estrategia Económica y Financiera* (April 1979), and in his prologue to Mario Latorre, *Política y elecciones* (Bogotá, 1980). In the latter, Cepeda Ulloa observed that the Colombian “Establishment” had lost control of vital social sectors, like the bureaucracy, the unions, the universities, and even the intellectual debate (*ibid.*, p. 33). I could not trace any links between these early references and the current usage of the term. Indeed, the next earliest reference I have been able to trace jumps to 1987, in Estanislao Zuleta, “La violencia política en Colombia,” in Zuleta, *Violencia, democracia y derechos humanos* (Medellín, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Sergio Otálora, “El ex-rehén,” *El Espectador*, January 28, 2000; Otty Patiño, “El hijo de nadie,” *El Tiempo*, May 30, 1999; Rudolf Hommes, “2010,” *El Tiempo*, October 14, 1999; Oscar Collazos, “Más sobre las terceras vías,” *El Tiempo*, April 29, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Antonio Caballero, “La frivolidad del establecimiento,” *Semana*, October 20, 2003; Roberto Pombo, “Ya llegó la fecha,” *Cambio*, May 10, 1999; and Alfredo Molano, “Lucho, Carlos, Daniel,” *El Espectador*, March 3, 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Juan Lozano, “Ingrid,” *El Tiempo*, March 2, 2002; Antonio Caballero, “Agua caliente,” *Semana*, October 16, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Antonio Caballero, “La derechización,” *Semana*, March 17, 2002. “The Colombian Establishment is of the extreme right, friend of violence, and its hands have never trembled for genocides,” in Juan Carlos Iragorri and Antonio Caballero, *Patadas de ahorcado. Caballero se desahoga. Una conversación con Juan Carlos Iragorri* (Bogotá, 2002), p. 84.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Samper Pizano, “Responsabilidades de Uribe y Lucho,” *El Tiempo*, October 29, 2003; Armando Benedetti Jimeno, “La puerta que da al infierno,” *El Tiempo*, March 19, 2002; Alfredo Molano, “El reto es para la derecha,” *El Espectador*, November 2, 2003. According to Fabio López La Roche, the tendency for the Establishment is to be “aggressive, *excluyente* and intolerant;” see his “Problemas y retos de los procesos de reinserción: reflexiones generales apoyadas en el estudio del caso del EPL,” in Ricardo Peñaranda and Javier Guerrero, eds., *De las armas a la política* (Bogotá, 1999), p. 154.

<sup>44</sup> Eduardo Escobar, “El plomo y el cobre,” *El Tiempo*, June 12, 2001.

<sup>45</sup> Caballero, “La frivolidad del establecimiento.”

<sup>46</sup> William Ramírez Tobón, “Violencia, guerra civil, contrato social,” in Juan Carlos Rodríguez Raga, ed., *Colombia. Cambio de siglo. Balances y perspectivas* (Bogotá, 2000), p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> Reinaldo Spitaletta, “Un ángel de fuego,” in Juan Carlos Vélez, ed., *Gonzalo Arango. Pensamiento vivo* (Medellín, 2000), p. 33.

<sup>48</sup> Rudolf Hommes, “Inquietudes sobre la paz,” *El Tiempo*, January 9, 1999. Ricardo Sánchez mentions the existence of a “new Establishment,” which he associates with the “new generations, the new elites.” See his *Crítica y alternativa de las izquierdas en Colombia* (Bogotá, 2001), pp. 300 and 307.

<sup>49</sup> Antonio Caballero, “Mamando gallo,” *Semana*, July 12, 1999; Pombo, “Ya llegó la fecha,” op.cit.; Roberto Pombo, “Soy moderadamente optimista,” interview with Alfonso Gómez Méndez, former attorney general currently aspiring to be the Liberal candidate for the presidency of the republic, in *El Tiempo*, August 12, 1998; Armando Benedetti Jimeno, “¿Todavía es 1964?” *El Tiempo*, March 6, 2000; interview with Felipe Santos, member of the Unión Patriótica, “La UP: un muerto viviente,” *El Tiempo*, December 11, 1999.

<sup>50</sup> “Muertos de la risa,” *Semana*, June 19, 2000; Gabriel Silva, “Ni libertad, ni orden,” *El Tiempo*, November 16, 1999; William Ospina, *¿Dónde está la franja amarilla?* (Bogotá, 2003), p. 28; Rafael Pardo, *De primera mano. Colombia, 1986–1994: entre conflictos y esperanzas* (Bogotá, 1996), p. 46; and Oscar Collazos, “Guerra y soberanía nacional,” *El Tiempo*, July 23, 1999.

<sup>51</sup> “La UP: un muerto viviente,” op. cit.

<sup>52</sup> Alfredo Molano, “De tratados y tratamientos,” *El Espectador*, May 23, 2004.

<sup>53</sup> Rudolf Hommes, “El otro Plan Colombia,” *El Tiempo*, July 20, 2000; Rafael Pardo, “Echar ojo a Caracas,” *El Espectador*, March 15, 2001; Augusto Trujillo Muñoz, “La universidad y el país: un examen mutuo,” *El Espectador*, September 6, 2000; “La otra guerra,” leading editorial article in *El Tiempo*, August 19, 2002; Gonzalo Sánchez, “Los intelectuales y la política,” in Sánchez et al., *Los intelectuales y la política* (Bogotá, 2003), p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> “Muertos de la risa,” op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Sánchez, *Crítica y alternativa de las izquierdas*, pp. 300–301.

<sup>56</sup> According to Francisco Leal Buitrago, the lack of “effective opening of the political system” in recent years can be explained, among other factors, by the practice of “political clientelism which impedes the emergence of forces that are not backed by the ‘establishment.’” See his “Las utopías de la paz,” in Leal Buitrago, ed., *Los laberintos de la Guerra* (Bogotá, 1999), p. 156.

<sup>57</sup> Collazos, “Más sobre las terceras vías,” op. cit.; Luis Cañón, “Acercando los extremos,” *El Espectador*, October 28, 1999; Molano, “Lucho, Carlos, Daniel,” op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> William Broderick, “Prólogo,” in Camilo Torres, *Escritos políticos* (Bogotá, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Otty Patiño, “Constanza merece una oportunidad,” *El Tiempo*, January 7, 2001; William Ospina, “Colombia en la encrucijada,” unpublished paper given at the London School of Economics, May 2000.

<sup>60</sup> Caballero, “Mamando gallo,” op. cit.

<sup>61</sup> Francisco Santos, “Todos sin norte,” *El Tiempo*, June 20, 1999.

<sup>62</sup> Alfredo Molano, “Paro agrario” and “La noche,” *El Espectador*, July 28, 1999 and December 3, 2000; interview with the entrepreneur Nicanor Restrepo by Patricia Lara, “La guerra se agota,” *Lecturas Dominicales, El Tiempo*, October 31, 1999; Francisco Manrique, “El arte de negociar,” *El Espectador*, September 1, 2001; Alfonso López Michelsen (former Colombian president), “La posibilidad de una tregua con el ELN,” *El Tiempo*, March 12, 2002; Héctor Rincón, “Interés,” *Cambio*, February 24, 2002; Jotamario Arbeláez, “La borrasca electoral,” *El Tiempo*, October 29, 2003; Sergio Otálora Montenegro, “Máscara contra toalla,” *El Espectador*, March 30, 2001; interview with Senator Carlos Gaviria (former president of the Constitutional Court), “Debemos ensayar la democracia,” *Cambio*, March 17, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Juan Carlos Rodríguez Raga, “Pocos sordos hacen muchos mudos,” *El Espectador*, August 9, 1999.

<sup>64</sup> Senator Juan Manuel Ospina and Representatives Roberto Camacho, Zulema Jattin and Luis Fernando Velasco, “Exposición de motivos al proyecto de ley de acuerdo humanitario,” in Presidencia, *Hechos de paz* (Bogotá, 1999), vol X, pp. 44–5.

<sup>65</sup> Rafael Pardo, in *El Espectador*, May 12, 1999; and Rudolf Hommes, “Desde el borde del abismo,” *El Tiempo*, January 17, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Sánchez, *Crítica y alternativa de las izquierdas*, p. 296.

<sup>67</sup> “No hay paz con un gobierno débil,” *Semana*, June 4, 1996. In earlier documents, leaders of the FARC seemed to have a preference for other terms, such as the “oligarchy” or the “system.” See Jacobo Arenas, *Cese al fuego. Una historia política de las FARC* (Bogotá, 1985), pp. 12, 100, 114, 135; and the interview with Manuel Marulanda in Carlos Arango, *FARC, veinte años de Marquetalia a la Uribe* (Bogotá, 1984), pp. 85–134.

<sup>68</sup> Published in *El Tiempo*, February 29, 1998.

<sup>69</sup> See Comisión temática de las FARC-EP, “El nuevo estado que queremos,” in *FARC. El país que proponemos construir* (Bogotá, 2001), pp. 40, 51, 55. See also Federico Sarmiento, “La post-crisis del proceso de paz: el papel de la sociedad civil y la comunidad internacional,” January 2002 (mimeo, possibly from Anncol); and Anncol’s news report, February 21, 2002; “No creemos en las encuestas: Raúl Reyes,” *El Espectador*, February 17, 2002; “Lección que dan las lecciones,” *Revista Resistencia*, (November 2001–February 2002); printed copy from FARC’s webpage in *Colombia en Perspectiva*, a web-based information service.

<sup>70</sup> “Fusilamiento es posible: Trinidad,” *El Tiempo*, October 27, 1999; and “La paz vendrá cuando la gente tenga empleo,” *El País* (Madrid), March 2, 2000.

<sup>71</sup> See Mauricio Vargas, *Tristes tigres. Revelador perfil de tres mandatarios que no pudieron cambiar a Colombia* (Bogotá, 2001), p. 141. According to León Valencia, for the last 52 years Marulanda, among his major aims, has been seeking, “a treatment as equals by leaders of the Establishment.” With Pastrana, Marulanda felt that “the Establishment was starting to treat him as an equal.” See Valencia, *Adiós a la política, bienvenida la guerra. Secretos de un malogrado proceso de paz* (Bogotá, 2002), pp. 84 and 90.

<sup>72</sup> Carlos Lozano, “El país que propone construir Manuel Marulanda Vélez,” in *FARC. El país que proponemos construir*, p. 11.

<sup>73</sup> Letter published in *Eltiempo.com*, January 8, 2002. The same paragraph was included in Marulanda’s letters to the Group of Friends of the peace process and to Monseñor Alberto Giraldo, the head of the Colombian Catholic Church. In *El Tiempo.com*, *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> “FARC descalifican,” *El Heraldo*, August 10, 2002.

<sup>75</sup> Rodrigo Pardo, “El destape de Lucho,” *El Tiempo*, June 7, 2001.

<sup>76</sup> Sergio Otálora Montenegro, “Ver para no dejar creer,” *El Espectador*, August 20, 1999; Luis Cañón, “El suceso del año,” *El Espectador*, December 12, 1999; William Ospina, “Negociar... es el reto,” *El Tiempo*, January 30, 2000.

<sup>77</sup> Alfredo Molano, “Errores de paso y de peso,” *El Espectador*, June 13, 1999. According to Hernando Gómez Buendía, “The Establishment should start to talk seriously about the costs, concessions and reforms that it is willing to accept to make peace achievable,” “El Frente por la paz,” *Semana*, November 30, 2000. See also Alfredo Molano, “Vuelve y juega,” *El Espectador*, May 21, 2000. For other references to the lack of willingness of the Establishment to meet the costs of peace, see Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, “Acerca de la dimensión internacional de la guerra y de la paz en Colombia: conjeturas sobre un futuro incierto,” in Leal Buitrago, ed., *Los laberintos de la guerra*, p. 259; Cecilia Orozco’s interview with Enrique Santos Calderóns, in Cecilia Orozco *¿Y ahora qué? El futuro de la guerra y la paz en Colombia* (Bogotá, 2002), p. 86.

<sup>78</sup> See an interview with Ossa in *El Tiempo*, “Lo que tenemos ahora no funciona,” August 26, 2000.

<sup>79</sup> Antonio Caballero, “La explosión ya,” *Semana*, October 22, 2001.

- <sup>80</sup> D'Artagnan [Roberto Posada Farcia Peña], "El mal ejemplo de ambas partes," *El Tiempo*, July 25, 2001.
- <sup>81</sup> Carlos Lemos Simmonds, "Cara a cara," *El Tiempo*, February 18, 2002.
- <sup>82</sup> Daniel Samper, "La paz en ambulancia," *El Tiempo*, January 16, 2002; Hernando Gómez Buendía, "¿Y ahora qué?," *Semana*, January 13, 2002; Gabriel Silva, "Las verdades de la guerra," *El Tiempo*, January 15, 2002; and Javier Fernández Riva, "Después de la prórroga," *Prospectiva económica y financiera*, January 21, 2002.
- <sup>83</sup> "Castillo de naipes," *Semana*, January 13, 2002; Armando Benedetti, "Los lunáticos de la guerra," *El Tiempo*, January 28, 2002.
- <sup>84</sup> The letter was published in *El Tiempo.com*, January 12, 2002.
- <sup>85</sup> See the following lead editorials in *El Tiempo*: "Las balanzas de la paz," "La hora de los paras," "Voces que deben ser escuchadas," "Quedan 48 Horas," "No quedarnos de brazos cruzados," on January 4, 5, 8, 11, and 17, 2002; "Darse o no la pela," "Claridad ante lo que se viene," "A más guerra, más democracia," on February 5, 22, and 25, 2002.
- <sup>86</sup> Alfonso López Michelsen, "El rostro de la guerra," *El Tiempo*, February 17, 2002; interview with Rafael Pardo in *Semana*, January 13, 2002.
- <sup>87</sup> Ramiro Bejarano, "Vientos de guerra," *El Espectador*, February 24, 2002.
- <sup>88</sup> Gabriel Silva, "La lógica macabra," *El Tiempo*, February 26, 2002.
- <sup>89</sup> Antonio Caballero, "Lo barato sale caro," *Semana*, February 24, 2002.
- <sup>90</sup> Juan Lozano, "Cobardía no," *El Tiempo*, February 25, 2002; Felipe Zuleta, "Ahora o nunca," *El Espectador*, February 24, 2002.
- <sup>91</sup> Rudolf Hommes, "Qué sigue?," *El Tiempo*, February 22, 2002.
- <sup>92</sup> Luis Alberto Restrepo, "The Crisis of the Current Political Regime and its Possible Outcomes," in Charles Bergquist et. al., eds., *Violence in Colombia, The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, 1992); Silva, "Ni libertad, ni orden," op. cit; article (untitled, available from author) in *Semana*, March 24, 2002; "El significado de los Vices," and "En la recta final," leading editorial articles in *El Tiempo*, April 2 and 29, 2002; Molano, "Errores de paso y de peso," op. cit.; Bruce Bagley and Gabriel Silva, "De cómo se ha formado la nación colombiana: una lectura política," *Estudios Sociales* 4, (March 1989), pp. 10, 14, 32 and 33; Gary Hoskin et al., "La decisión de voto en las elecciones presidenciales de 2002," in Hoskin et al., eds., *Colombia 2002. Elecciones, comportamiento electoral y democracia* (Bogotá, 2003), p. 57.
- <sup>93</sup> In his classical study on the power elite, Mills, for example, who did not use the term "Establishment," nevertheless referred several times to the "military establishment;" see Mills, *The Power Elite*, pp. 4, 7, 9 and 270.
- <sup>94</sup> Alfredo Molano, "Balance y perspectivas" and "Colombia y los derechos humanos," *El Espectador*, January 16, 2000, and April 22, 2001. A close advisor to President Alvaro Uribe has also referred to "progressive" members of the Establishment: see José Obdulio Gaviria, *Sofismas del terrorismo en Colombia* (Bogotá, 2005), p. 176.
- <sup>95</sup> Ospina, "Colombia en la encrucijada," op. cit.
- <sup>96</sup> Gabriel Silva, "Después de la guerra," *El Tiempo*, February 8, 2000. See also Roberto Pombo, "La voz de Cano," *Cambio*, November 15, 1999; María Isabel Rueda, "Nada está escrito," *Semana*, June 21, 2002; Jesús Antonio Bejarano, "¿Avanza Colombia hacia la paz?" in Carlos Ossa, et al., eds., 1999: *Un año de turbulencia. Ensayos económicos de la Contraloría* (Bogotá, 2000), p. 355.
- <sup>97</sup> Alfredo Molano, "Dificultades," *El Espectador*, December 12, 1999.
- <sup>98</sup> "Serenidad, patriotismo y rectificaciones," lead editorial in *El Espectador*, May 27, 1999; "Los hombres del Presidente," *Semana*, June 7, 1999; Alejandro Reyes Posada, "A voltear la marea," *El Tiempo*, September 22, 1999.
- <sup>99</sup> Antonio Caballero's speech at his acceptance of the *Premio Nacional de Periodismo Simón Bolívar*, published in *Semana.com*, n.d.

<sup>100</sup> Otty Patiño, “¿Por qué Ingrid?,” *El Tiempo*, May 31, 2002. Oscar Collazos referred to Betancourt’s “crusade against the national Establishment;” see his *El poder para quién. Serpa, Sanín, Uribe, Garzón y Betancourt responden* (Bogotá, 2001), p. 16. Betancourt herself once claimed that she was “vetoed by the Establishment;” see interview in *Cambio*, November 16, 2001. As part of a commission that visited the zone where peace talks were taking place during the Pastrana administration, Ingrid Betancourt said to the FARC’s leader that his organization was “the best reason for the Establishment to remain unchanged.” See Ingrid Betancourt, *La rabia en el corazón* (Barcelona, 2001), p. 302. According to Eduardo Sáenz Rovner, Betancourt’s links with the business Establishment date back to the time when her father worked for the ANDI (association of entrepreneurs). See Sáenz Rovner review of Betancourt’s book in *Análisis Político* 43 (May–August 2001), p. 127.

<sup>101</sup> Hernando Gómez Buendía’s column in *Semana*, April 29, 2001.

<sup>102</sup> Jaime Castro, *La cuestión territorial* (Bogotá, 2002), p. 177.

<sup>103</sup> Vera Grabe, *Razones de vida* (Bogotá, 2000), p. 226.

<sup>104</sup> “Darse o no la pela es la cuestión,” *El Tiempo*, February 5, 2002.

<sup>105</sup> Alfredo Molano, “El juez,” *El Espectador*, June 20, 1999. Rafael Pardo has referred to the growing delegitimation of the Establishment, together with that of the state and the government. See his *De primera mano*, op cit., pp. 211, 248.

<sup>106</sup> Alfredo Molano, “Deliberancia armada,” *El Espectador*, June 6, 1999; and Hernando Gómez Buendía, “El malestar militar,” *El Tiempo*, January 1, 1999.

<sup>107</sup> María Isabel Rueda, *Semana*, May 24, 1999.

<sup>108</sup> Alfredo Molano, “La noche,” *El Espectador*, December 3, 2000.

<sup>109</sup> Alfredo Molano, “Dificultades,” *El Espectador*, December 12, 1999, and Ramiro Bejarano, “¿No hay nada que agregar?” *El Espectador*, June 11, 1999. See also Alejandro Santos Rubino, “8 mm,” *Semana*, July 12, 1999. Similar comments are made about President Betancur’s government and his inability to unify the Establishment around his peace proposals. See Alfredo Rangel, *Guerra insurgente. Conflictos en Malasia, Perú, Filipinas, El Salvador y Colombia* (Bogotá, 2001), p. 363; Celicia Orozco’s interview with Nicanor Restrepo, Orozco, *¿Y ahora qué?*, p. 116; Hernando Gómez Buendía, *El lío de Colombia. ¿Por qué no logramos salir de la crisis?* (Bogotá, 2000), p. 89. For Vera Grabe, Betancur’s plan “scandalized the Establishment;” see her *Razones de vida*, p. 226. According to Antonio Navarro Wolf, a former leader of the M19, “The Establishment did not think well of Betancur’s policy towards us. Part of that Establishment and the military withdrew their support ...” in Antonio Navarro Wolf and Juan Carlos Iragorri, *Mi guerra es la paz. Navarro se confiesa con Juan Carlos Iragorri* (Bogotá, 2004), p. 66.

<sup>110</sup> Francisco Santos, “Cambio de tercio,” *El Tiempo*, May 30, 1999. See also Edgar Téllez et al., *Diario íntimo de un fracaso. Historia no contada del proceso de paz con las FARC* (Bogotá, 2002), p. 233.

<sup>111</sup> Rafael Pardo in *El Espectador*, May 12, 1999.

<sup>112</sup> Molano, “Vuelve y juega,” op. cit.

<sup>113</sup> Luis Cañón, “El suceso del año,” *El Espectador*, December 12, 1999; and Sergio Otálora’s article in *El Espectador*, November 19, 1999.

<sup>114</sup> Armando Benedetti Jimeno, “¿Y qué quiere el salvavidas?” *El Tiempo*, June 12, 2000; Antonio Caballero, “Mamando gallo,” and “La frivolidad,” op. cit.

<sup>115</sup> Roberto Pombo, “La voz de Cano,” *Cambio*, November 15, 1999.

<sup>116</sup> Collazos, “Más sobre terceras vías,” op. cit.

<sup>117</sup> *Semana*, November 2, 2003.

<sup>118</sup> Trujillo Muñoz, “La universidad y el país,” op. cit. Alvaro Uribe, César Gaviria, Enrique Peñalosa, Andrés Pastrana and Noemí Sanín were the “heads of the Establishment,” according to León Valencia; they left behind the directors of both parties, liberal and conservative. “The new



leaders of the country want to be accompanied by highly qualified technocrats,” Valencia, “La nueva cara del Establecimiento,” *El Tiempo*, June 24, 2002.

<sup>119</sup> “Elecciones cargadas de castigos regionales,” *El Espectador*, November 1, 2000.

<sup>120</sup> Luis E. Garzón, “Legitimar el Estado,” *Cambio*, n.d.; *El Tiempo*, May 27, 2002; *Semana*, November 2, 2003; León Valencia, “¿Una nueva fuerza política?” *El Tiempo*, March 31, 2000.

<sup>121</sup> Serpa, however, was said to have been gaining respect from the Establishment. Rodrigo Pardo “¿Serpo-Pastranismo?” *El Tiempo*, April 5, 2000.

<sup>122</sup> Interview in *El Tiempo*, June 6, 1999.

<sup>123</sup> Ingrid Betancourt interviewed in Collazos, *El poder para quién*, p. 55. Carlos Castaño, once AUC’s leader, referred to Serpa as the “candidate of the Establishment” during the 2002 presidential campaign. See Mauricio Aranguren Molina, *Mi confesión. Carlos Castaño revela sus secretos* (Bogotá, 2002). p. 176.

<sup>124</sup> “No me dejarán ser presidente,” said Horacio Serpa, *El Tiempo*, June 1, 2002. See also his comments on the Establishment in “Discurso de Horacio Serpa en la Convención Bancaria,” Cartagena, June 2001, unpublished mimeo. See also Carlos Murcia, “Mi punto de vista,” *El Herald*, June 2, 2002. In 1998, when Serpa was also a presidential candidate, *Semana* expressed the view that he was still to gain the support of the “*clase dirigente*,” as if Serpa was outside of such “*clase dirigente*.” “Candidato anunciado,” *Semana*, January 26, 1998.

<sup>125</sup> Mauricio Vargas, “Cúltese a sí mismo, Serpa,” *Cambio*, June 10, 2002.

<sup>126</sup> *Semana*, March 13, 2004.

<sup>127</sup> “Julio Mario Santodomingo, por él mismo,” *Lecturas Dominicales, El Tiempo*, September 7, 2003. For a recent study on the growing importance of economic groups, see Michael Beaulieu, “Economic Groups and Politics in Colombia,” unpublished DPhil, Oxford, 2001.

<sup>128</sup> When asked for his views on the peace process, Luis Carlos Sarmiento warned that the government ought to follow the negotiations with prudence, taking into account that the final aim of the negotiations was not the “destruction of the Establishment.” *El Tiempo*, n.d.

<sup>129</sup> Antonio Caballero, “La explosión, ya ,” *Semana*, October 22, 2001.

<sup>130</sup> See Javier Guerrero, “La sobrepolitización del narcotráfico en Colombia en los años ochenta y sus interferencias en los procesos de paz,” in Peñaranda and Guerrero, eds., *De las armas a la política*, p. 225; and Restrepo, “The Crisis of the Current Political Regime,” p. 289.

<sup>131</sup> “Muertos de la risa,” *Semana*, June 19, 2000. Former President López has noted that the apparent political and social force acquired by the paramilitaries is due to the belief that they are defending the Establishment. See Alfonso López Michelsen, *Palabras pendientes. Conversaciones con Enrique Santos Calderón* (Bogotá, 2001). “The AUC serves as an umbrella organization for small and large vigilante groups... to combat the guerrillas and defend the ‘establishment’ at all costs,” in Ana María Bejarano and Eduardo Pizarro, “From ‘Restricted’ to ‘Besieged’: The Changing Nature of the Limits to Democracy in Colombia,” mimeo, n.d., p. 22.

<sup>132</sup> Molano, “Dificultades,” op. cit.; Rudolf Hommes, “El otro Plan Colombia,” op. cit. The sociologist William Ramírez talks about “upper and middle classes of the Establishment.” See Ramírez, “Violencia, guerra civil, contrato social,” p. 62.

<sup>133</sup> Luis Eduardo Garzón interviewed by *Cambio*, April 10, 2000.

<sup>134</sup> Ingrid Betancourt interviewed by Oscar Collazos, in Collazos, *El poder para quién*, p. 55.

<sup>135</sup> “Sí, creo que voy a ser presidente,” interview in *El Tiempo*, 30 May 1999; “Me voy a dejar contar,” interview in *Semana*, 10 March 2002.

<sup>136</sup> Collazos, *El poder para quién*, pp. 147 and 122.

<sup>137</sup> Vera Grabe, *Razones de vida*, p. 330.

<sup>138</sup> “Coronel Ruiz debe ir a juicio,” *El Tiempo*, October 22, 1999; and letter from Alvaro Gómez to the secretary of the Movimiento de Salvación Nacional, published in *Lecturas Dominicales, El Tiempo*, September 29, 1996.

<sup>139</sup> Patiño, “Constanza merece una oportunidad,” *El Tiempo*, January 7, 2001, and Valencia, *Adiós a la política*, p. 29.

<sup>140</sup> Cited in Téllez et al., *Diario íntimo de un fracaso*, p. 250. “Pedro Gómez... was reknowned even by the FARC for his reformist spirit and position critical of the Establishment,” in Ricardo Correa Robledo, “Empresarios, conflicto armado y procesos de paz en Colombia,” in Luis Alberto Restrepo, ed., *Síntesis 2002–2003. Colombia* (Bogotá, 2004), p. 36. Gómez Barrera himself has used the word; see “Empresarios, la paz es el mejor negocio,” *El Heraldo*, November 1, 1999.

<sup>141</sup> *Semana*, March 24, 2002.

<sup>142</sup> See, for example, Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, ed., *Degradación o cambio. Evolución del sistema político colombiano* (Bogotá, 2001).

<sup>143</sup> I have discussed the problem of self-delegitimation in Colombia, in ‘*Ilegitimidad*’ del estado en Colombia, op. cit. For a study of the issue of self-delegitimation see Rodney Barker, *Legitimizing Identities. The Self-representation of Rulers and Subjects* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>144</sup> See Eduardo Posada Carbó, Malcolm Deas and Charles Powell, *La paz y sus principios* (Bogotá, 2002); and Deas, “La paz: entre los principios y la práctica.”

<sup>145</sup> Fernando Savater, *Mira por dónde. Autobiografía razonada* (Madrid, 2003), p. 283; Vaclav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace* (New York, 1990), chapter III.

<sup>146</sup> During the presidential campaign, when asked about the fate of the Unión Patriótica in an interview with a group of academics, Uribe responded: “In that tragedy two mistakes took place: one, from the guerrillas, who wanted to continue mixing politics with arms, and the other from the Establishment and the government, which did not have sufficient determination to protect the former guerrillas or the members of the UP.” In “Desayunos de Votebien.com,” from *Eltiempo.com*, n.d. José Obdulio Gaviria, a close advisor of President Uribe, uses the expression several times in his recent book, *Sofismas del terrorismo*, pp 153, 176 and 219. The term is also used by the government’s Alto Comisionado Para la Paz, Luis Alberto Restrepo, in his book *Más allá del terror* (Bogotá, 2002), p. 94.

<sup>147</sup> See Ana Carrigan, “Looking for Allies in Colombia,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 2002; “A symbol—but of what?” *The Economist*, March 20, 2004; Juan Carlos Irargorri, “La resurrección de un proceso,” *El País*, January 19, 2002. The latter is a Colombian journalist and writer, but the international editor of *El País*, Miguel Angel Bastenier, has also used the word. See his “Pastrana 3—Colombia 1,” *Cambio*, January 27, 2002. For the use of the expression by the Italian diplomat Francesco Vincenti, see *La Revista, El Espectador*, June 3, 2001; by a German historian, see Tomas Fischer, “La constante guerra civil en Colombia,” in P. Waldmann and F. Reinares, eds., *Sociedades en guerra civil. Conflictos violentos de Europa y América Latina* (Barcelona, Buenos Aires and Mexico, 1995), p. 274; by a US researcher, Forrest Hylton, “An Evil Hour: Uribe’s Colombia in Historical Perspective,” *New Left Review* 23 (Sept/Dec 2003), p. 85; by British academics, Alan Angell, Pamela Lowden and Rosemary Thorp, *Decentralizing Development. The Political Economy of Institutional Change in Colombia and Chile* (Oxford, 2001), p. 22.

<sup>148</sup> Roberto Pombo’s article in *Cambio*, from personal notes without date. Similarly Armando Benedetti has referred to the Establishment as “whatever such thing be,” in “Los lunáticos de la guerra,” *El Tiempo*, January 28, 2002.

<sup>149</sup> Deas, “La paz: entre los principios y la práctica,” p. 182.

<sup>150</sup> Some of the critiques Daniel Bell and Robert Dahl made in reference to Mill’s concept of “power elite” seem to me also applicable to the “Colombian Establishment.” See their essays in Domhoff and Ballard, eds., *C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite*.

<sup>151</sup> An “anti-aristocratic” discourse can be traced back to General Obando in the 1830s. Rafael Núñez, Colombia’s most prominent statesman during the second half of the 19th century, used the expression “oligarchy,” referring not to any economic elite but to those who controlled party

politics. According to former President Alfonso López Michelsen, that was also the meaning given to the term by Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the liberal leader who systematically used it in his discourse during the 1920s–40s. See his essay on Gaitán in López, *Esbozos y atisbos* (Bogotá, 1984).

<sup>152</sup> Rubio, *Crimen e impunidad*, pp. 225–226. Rubio actually uses the term “*establecimiento*.” He also talks about a “harmonious ideological symbiosis between an establishment and its strongest opponents in arms,” *ibid.*, pp. 226–227.

<sup>153</sup> Posada Carbó, *‘Ilegitimidad’ del estado*.

<sup>154</sup> J. Goldfarb, *Civility and Subversion. The Intellectual in Democratic Society* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>155</sup> See, for example, Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (London, 1999), chapter 5; and Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy. The Liberal State Response* (London, 2002), chapter 9.

<sup>156</sup> Deas, “Una isla rodeada de consejos.”