

Revision of the Concept of Political Class and Analogues in the History of the Department of Caldas*

[English version]

Revisión del concepto clase política y análogos en la historia del departamento de Caldas

Revisão do conceito de classe política e analogias na história do departamento de Caldas

Received August 23, 2019. Accepted June 1, 2020.

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Colombia

Abstract

› To cite this article:

Cruz, Julio (2021). Revision of the Concept of Political Class and Analogues in the History of the Department of Caldas.

Ánfora, 28(50), 297-321

<https://doi.org/10.30854/anfv28.n50.2021.649>

Universidad Autónoma de Manizales. ISSN 0121-6538 /

e-ISSN 2248-6941.

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Objective: Review article that seeks to identify the theoretical developments of the concept of political class and its analogues; in addition, it is about capturing the differences of these concepts to show the transformations of the political class in Caldas.

Methodology: a qualitative meta-analysis of the findings was applied, which were derived from the documentary search around the aforementioned key concepts, based on certain categories and analysis criteria. **Results:** a definition of political class was reached, understood as a group of individuals who have an organic relationship

* This current article is the product of the thesis entitled: "La secta del fénix. La formación discursiva del paramilitarismo en Caldas (1980-2006)", to qualify for a Master's degree in political studies from the Universidad de Caldas. The financing of the project was assumed by the researcher, who declared that there was no conflict of interest in the execution of the research project.

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with politics and direct interests placed in it; this, regardless of whether or not they hold public office, although they do hold political power, such as the possibility of making decisions that affect members of the public sphere. With this categorization, an analysis was made of the uses of these concepts in Colombia and Caldas. There the continuities and transformations of its political class are shown from the Antioquia Colonization to the present time, and its configuration as a leading group and the role played in the future of the department are specified. **Conclusions:** it highlights the cyclical nature of Caldense politics in relation to its political elites in light of recent events. The classic statement regarding the theory of elites is also confirmed, which assumes these groupings as a constant in all democracies.

Keywords: Political science; Political class; Oligarchy; Political elite; Dominant class; Caldas-Colombia.

Resumen

Objetivo: artículo de Revisión que busca identificar los desarrollos teóricos del concepto clase política y análogos; además, se trata de captar las diferencias de dichos conceptos para mostrar las transformaciones de la clase política en Caldas. **Metodología:** se aplicó meta-análisis cualitativo de los hallazgos, los cuales derivaron de la búsqueda documental en torno a los mencionados conceptos clave, a partir de determinadas categorías y criterios de análisis. **Resultados:** se llegó a una definición de clase política, entendida como grupo de individuos que tienen una relación orgánica con la política e intereses directos puestos en ella; esto, independientemente de que ejerzan o no un cargo público, aunque sí el poder político, como la posibilidad de tomar decisiones que afecten a los miembros de la esfera pública. Con esta categorización se hizo un análisis de los usos de estos conceptos en Colombia y Caldas. Allí se muestran las continuidades y transformaciones de su clase política desde la Colonización Antioqueña hasta la época actual, y se especifica su configuración como grupo dirigente y el papel desempeñado en el devenir del departamento. **Conclusiones:** se destaca el carácter cíclico de la política caldense en relación con sus élites políticas a la luz de los acontecimientos recientes. También se confirma la afirmación clásica en cuanto a la teoría de las élites, la cual asume estas agrupaciones como una constante en todas las democracias.

Palabras-clave: Ciencia política; Clase política; Oligarquía; Élite política; Clase dominante; Caldas-Colombia.

Resumo

Objetivo: artigo de revisão que busca identificar os desdobramentos teóricos do conceito de classe política e seus análogos; além disso, trata-se de captar as diferenças desses conceitos para mostrar as transformações da classe política em Caldas.

Metodologia: aplicou-se uma meta-análise qualitativa dos achados, derivados da busca documental em torno dos conceitos-chave mencionados, com base em determinadas categorias e critérios de análise.

Resultados: chegou-se a uma definição de classe política, entendida como um conjunto de indivíduos que têm uma relação orgânica com a política e interesses diretos nela colocados; isto, independentemente de exercerem ou não cargos públicos, embora detenham poder político, como a possibilidade de tomar decisões que afetam membros da esfera pública. Com essa categorização, foi feita uma análise dos usos desses conceitos na Colômbia e Caldas. Nela se mostram as continuidades e transformações de sua classe política desde a colonização de Antioquia até a atualidade, especificando-se sua configuração como grupo dirigente e o papel desempenhado no futuro do departamento. **Conclusões:** destaca a natureza cíclica da política caldense em relação às suas elites políticas à luz dos acontecimentos recentes. Também se confirma a afirmação clássica a respeito da teoria das elites, que assume esses agrupamentos como uma constante em todas as democracias.

Palavras-chave: Ciência Política; Classe política; Oligarquia; Elite política; Classe dominante; Caldas-Colômbia.

Introduction

The division between the group of people who perform government functions and those who are governed has been a matter of debate since ancient times. This social division was not alien to the classical philosophical tradition, since from there it has become a field of research for disciplines of the social sciences. From the Hellenic philosophical tradition, which asked questions about the wealthy minority that exercised power, called the oligarchy, sociology has debated about the social relations inherent in the constitution of elites, and political science has wanted to do this field one of his objects of study.

The developments of these ideas range from positions that envision a monolithic and closed elite to those that speak of pluralism, from positive views of the division between the rulers and the ruled, to those that subscribe to the tradition of the homologous, greedy oligarchy. The discussion held for several years between the schools of thought around this issue has fed back the positions and led to conclusions that offer a sharper and deeper look at the issue.

In the case of the regions, there are also analyses that account for the particularities of the exercise of power in administratively less extensive contexts than the nation-state, the divergences that occur between one and the other, their continuities and convergent points. Likewise, it is important to take into account the role of armed conflicts in shaping elites and the relationships established between the violent and professional politicians.

This study develops a bibliographic review with which a theoretical body is built from which the development of the political class in Colombia is interpreted and, particularly, in the department of Caldas, it takes as its historical starting point the process of the Antioquia Colonization and up to the present. The analysis and comparison of these concepts, commonly used by both academics and the general public, should show their heuristic capacity in the context of Caldas, the relevance, limitations and precision of their application. In this sense, the analysis will serve as a theoretical support that enriches the debate and academic and political reflection in the region in relation to its leading sector, its perspectives and the role that citizens play in its configuration, current situation and eventual change, if necessary.

Methodology

The methodological path of this review article was based on a compilation of research works around the concepts of political elites, oligarchy, ruling class,

political class and corporatism as concepts, specifically in the department of Caldas and a general panorama for the Colombian case.

The analysis texts were selected under the following criteria: referring to the issue of public relations and power, that is, politics, specifically to the ruling minorities under the concepts already mentioned; the significance of their postulates, which allows them to be considered classics on this subject; its actuality in relation to national and regional contexts; referring to the political history of the department of Caldas in the period of time addressed from 1980 to 2006.

The information collected was categorized according to this classification and the corresponding analysis is made, consisting of the relationship between the authors and their postulates, for which the approach of Sartori (1970) on the comparison of concepts in political science was taken as a guide. This analysis is determined by the categories of minority government, public power, power relations, exercise of power, and elite theory.

Results

Oligarchy, Elite, Political Class... Avatars of a Definition

There is no consensus in the social sciences on how to conceptually nominate the social groups that exercise power. However, a copious bibliography can be found on the matter. Bobbio (1981, 1982) makes an important contribution to this discussion based on the concepts of oligarchy and the theory of elites. With regard to the oligarchy, this author highlights two traditions: the one that uses it in a pejorative sense, as a synonym for the government of the rich, and the one that applies it descriptively to refer to the government of a few, a meaning closer to its etymology.

On the other hand, the concept of political class appears in Mosca (1984) and that of the ruling class is typical of much of the Marxist tradition. Regarding the concept of the elite, the debate will be assumed based on the elitism / pluralism / Marxism discussion that is its own. The main findings are shown below based on the significance and / or topicality of the theories developed and the definitions provided, in relation to the public exercise of power, its relations and the government of minorities.

Oligarchy.

In the search for the discriminatory power of the concept in question (Sartori, 1970), it can be affirmed that there is consensus among the exponents of

political philosophy, both classical and modern, regarding the positive / negative character of the aristocracy / oligarchy dyad respectively and to the opposition of the latter to democracy.

The oligarchy is defined, according to the ancient Greek tradition - from which the term emerges - as the government in which the mandate corresponds to the rich, since the social organization is based on individual possessions (Plato, 1986, p. 238); constitutes a perverted form of government in relation to the aristocracy, a form of government par excellence (pp. 232-233), insofar as it governs for itself and not for its subjects (Aristotle, 2004, p. 96); that is to say, it becomes a degenerate form of this, since the privilege falls on the possession of wealth, which contradicts the moral principles of the government (Rousseau, 2004, p. 101).

The reasons for this corruption lie in the inheritance of power by the nobility, which appears already when the nobility rules for itself instead of for the subjects (Montesquieu, 1984, p. 114), or in other words, the predominance of greed over virtue (Plato, 1986, p. 232).

At first glance it may seem that the definition of oligarchy is limited to the possession of wealth by those who exercise the government, the main reason for its derogatory character, mainly in the classical Greek tradition (Bobbio, 1982, p. 1118) and would move away from the idea of government of a few, as indicated by its etymology. But a closer look shows that, to the extent that the oligarchy is presented as the negative form of the aristocracy or government of the most capable of a society, the idea of a minority is implicit, since in any social group both better than the rich are usually few (Aristotle, 2004, p. 96), which reinforces the contemptuous character that this denomination possesses to this day (Bobbio, 1982, p. 1118).

This argument does not satisfy the need for an exhaustive definition of the concept, since it avoids the debate on the essence of the oligarchy in relation to the minority or wealth. Along the same lines is the consideration of democracy as a government of the poor (Plato, 1986, pp. 232-233), who should be considered as the majority. It can be argued that the arrival of workers' parties in the administration of the State complies with the minority precept but not with that of wealth and, even so, constitutes an oligarchy.

Other definitions that escape this comparative framework (Sartori, 1970) refer to the oligarchy simply as the name that its dissatisfied subjects give to the aristocracy (Hobbes, 1994, p. 151), or as the form of government that leaves the power to make laws to a select few men (Locke, 1985, p. 91), without mentioning anything about their wealth, but referring to the minority character of this form of government. Thus, the concept of oligarchy is more useful when it is

assumed in its meaning of government of the few than when it is taken as the government of the rich, since the latter carries the problems already mentioned.

Theory of Elites.

From another theoretical perspective, the derogatory nature of the term oligarchy is reduced, since the idea of government of the wealthy loses weight. The theory of elites is based on the idea that “all the governments that existed and those that will exist have always been governments of a few (...), governments of organized minorities, or of elites” (Bobbio, 1982, p. 1119), [Own translation] ergo, they are oligarchic. Thus, both in democracies and monarchies, the rulers constitute an organized group that holds political power, regardless of their economic condition (although Aristotle's presumption is still valid).

The development of this theory is supported by sociology, to affirm that the degree and magnitude of organization of the ruling elite must be observed to understand the sources of its power. From there derives the thesis of the existence in all political organisms of a ruling class and a governed class, which is later called the ruling or political class interchangeably (Mosca, 1984, p. 87). Another perspective was more concerned with the struggles between the elites; the relationships between these lead to a theory of social equilibrium (Pareto, 1980).

Applications of the first mentioned perspective have been tested on a smaller scale, since it refers to large social groups (the State or regional and local governments), through empirical work in political parties that showed how differences also operate in these contexts between a directed mass and a ruling elite (Michels, 1972) which, incidentally, is called the oligarchy; in fact, this theorist is the author of the famous *hard law of the oligarchy*, expressed in the following terms: “The organization is what gives rise to the dominance of the elected over the electors, of the leaders over the constituents, of the delegates over the ones who delegate. He who speaks of organization, speaks of oligarchy” (Michels, 1972, p. 189). [Own translation]

This theory starts from a convergent definition of elites, understood as those social groups that occupy the upper social strata in terms of power and wealth, and political elites as those that have the ability to make decisions that affect at the same time the members of the group they belong to (Bolívar, 2002). This confirms its belonging to the same convergent conceptual body, characterized by the conservative and monolithic gaze of the elites, critical of liberal democracy, but distinguishable from other traditions referring to the same phenomenon, with which it can be compared (Sartori, 1970).

Subsequent developments of this sociological gaze have led to what is called *social characteristics of elites* (Coller, 1999). In this order of ideas, analyses focused on the idea that social origins and education have a specific weight in the formation of political elites are brought up (Mills, 1987, pp. 25-26). To this is added that the social characteristics of the elites tend to be similar, thus creating a kind of dominant socio-political caste (Putman, 1976), an opinion shared by other authors who observed the American case (Coller, 1999). These theses are also included in the monolithic approach to the elites, distinguishable from the approach previously analyzed basically for dealing with more current issues and therefore within the framework of more complex social relations.

Liberal and pluralist currents have criticized the monolithic character of the elite that Mills (1987) presents, and argue that in complex societies, such as the United States, there are several elites that fight for power and distribute it to each other, something that is in the way of Putman's idea (1976). In this vein, we talk about the impossibility of empirically testing the thesis of the monolithic elite of Mills (1987) by showing that its composition is not well defined (Dahl, 1958, p. 466). Another perspective adds that the fundamental characteristic of competition between elites in democracies is the struggle for the popular vote (Schumpeter, 1983, again in line with Putman, 1976, pp. 359-360). Thus, the postulate of Aron (1950) about the difference between the organized and unified Soviet elite and the divided western elites can be mentioned (p. 10). Another idea maintains that it is not possible to constrain the analysis of power in general and of elites in particular, and proposes to address the question taking into account both the explicit and the hidden dimensions (Lukes, 2007, p. 69).

A position close to pluralism, but far from liberalism is that embodied by neo-corporatism, a current that draws from the Keynesian Welfare State and that conceives the relationship between elites as a negotiation in which all groups can participate and obtain influence, in exchange for sacrificing some of their demands, since none of these groups has sufficient capacity to impose their interests on the others.

The negotiation is arranged with the State itself, given that this current starts from the budget of capitalist social relations, and that the State does not have autonomy from these elites. The fundamental objective of this approach is "inter-organizational agreement, that is, negotiation between a limited and exclusive group of organizations, which mutually recognize *status* and the ability to reach and apply relatively stable commitments" (Schmitter, 1985, p. 67). [Own translation]

Other contemporary approaches have focused on the characteristics of the political elites beyond the simplistic and mechanical division between the rulers and the governed mass, which includes the types of elites, their qualities,

their forms of recruitment among others, which derives from considering the study of elites as a specific social group (Blondel and Müller-Rommel, 2007); the influence of the personality traits of the members of the political elite in the public decisions of a territorial unit (Arana-Araya, 2016); in addition, the characteristics of the elites as the basis for the formation of sociopolitical coalitions and the definition of the variations of the political parties (Best and Cotta, 2000; Lispet and Rokkan, 1967). Therefore, in this case it is possible to say that the concept of elite theory has a holistic analytical utility, since both the conservative and monolithic stance and the pluralist and neo-corporate critiques allow configuring a broad and complete view of the phenomenon addressed here, in relation both with its internal logic and with the external aspects related to the different types of society that we speak of.

Political Class.

The following authors are explicit in marking a theoretical difference between political class and the political elite:

Unlike the concept of the political elite, that of political class does not specifically refer to individuals who hold positions of special power and influence, but rather refers to the larger and also more easily identifiable group of individuals who make a living from politics. The political class possess peculiar interests and perspectives as a consequence of the positions they occupy and the roles they play in social life (Alcántara and Llamazares, 1997, pp. 15-16).
[Own translation]

Thus, the political elite here refers to professional politicians, not necessarily related to the oligarchy, and is closer to the idea of technocrats in the public administration. The term political class has a lot of presence in the literature on elites - as seen in Bobbio (1981) -, however its use is usually relaxed and generic. It seems that in front of this denomination there is a reference lacking a conceptual body on which analysis with scientific pretension can be made (Sartori, 1970). However, it is preserved to maintain the possibility of comparison with the other concepts addressed and because its use in political science is widespread.

Ruling Class.

From the other ideological camp, Marxism has criticized the theory of the elites as a whole. For the representatives of this school of thought, the pluralist

version of the theory of elites is incompatible with social reality, since political power is almost exclusively concentrated in those who hold private property over the means of production. Hence the concept of the ruling class, a Marxist version of the elite or the oligarchy. The concept of class becomes fundamental in this current, and refers to the social grouping of subjects according to their position with respect to the means of production; its holders make up the different sectors of the bourgeoisie, while the dispossessed swell the ranks of the proletarian mass (Marx and Engels, 1973, pp. 31-32).

Now, there is in the Marxist tradition a concept that is related to the debate for political power, but it is not comparable with the classic idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, in which this social class forcibly assumes control of the State to institute from there socialism and undermine the bourgeois counterrevolution. The concept of hegemony considers the cultural aspect as a strategic possibility to maintain the revolutionary objectives once the political victory has been achieved, for which consensus and force are combined:

The “normal” exercise of hegemony is characterized by a combination of force and consensus that are balanced, without force overcoming the consensus too much, but rather appearing supported by the consensus of the majority expressed by the so-called organs of the public opinion (Gramsci, 1981, p. 124).
[Own translation]

These bodies of public opinion are the institutions of civil society created voluntarily, and that serve to spread the ideas of the rulers (press, church, parties, schools, NGOs, research groups, etc.). This is one of the two tactics that guarantee the hegemony of the rulers; the other is the group of intellectuals who are in charge of communicating the dominant ideas to the dominated, without neglecting the possibility of repression when necessary. Thus, “hegemony... included both the obtaining by the rulers of the consent of the governed and the application of the necessary coercion to enforce their orders” (Anderson, 2018, p. 31). [Own translation]. Despite the fact that the concept of the ruling class is increasingly rare in the literature on politics, its contributions are still present in the debate, and it continues to be useful given its heuristic power against the phenomenon of power today.

Thus, and after carrying out a comparative exercise of the concepts that refer to minorities in power (Sartori, 1970), for the purposes of this article we will appeal to the concept of political class understood as the group of individuals who have an organic relationship with politics and direct interests placed on it, regardless of whether or not they hold public office (Alcántara and Llamazares, 1997, pp. 15-16), but bearing in mind that they can exercise political power,

understood as the possibility of making decisions that affect members of the public sphere (Bolívar, 2002, p. 388). This definition is preferred to that of the elite, since it has a connotation very close to that of aristocracy, understood as a select minority, that is, superior, and therefore better empowered to exercise governing functions, in the line of Plato (1986) and Aristotle (2004).

The concept of oligarchy is not adequate either, given its negative semantic load and the marked ideological use that it has acquired, and the conceptual proximity of all the theoretical traditions addressed is highlighted. Therefore, the concept of political class encompasses other aspects, remembering that class is referred to not in the Marxist sense that links it to the economic aspect, but as a group of individuals, that is, in a sociological key.

The Constitution of the Political Class in Caldas

When going from national to regional analysis, it must be taken into account that there is a difference between the two, which consists of the different political dynamics that operate in each scenario. The tendency of the country to have a few families or predominant political groups is also observed in the case of Caldas, as will be seen later, without always speaking of the same groups. In the regions there are some elites that control the strategic positions of the public administration on an oligarchic basis, but these do not necessarily have the same influence at the national level; its domain is limited, in most cases, to its locality (Jaramillo, 2009).

A different situation is that the regional elites have dialogue with the national administration, which is for their own benefit, as is the case in Caldas. Thus, a thesis like Avila's (2018) would not contradict this reality in the regions. On the other hand, it is also pertinent to point out that violence has been a phenomenon that has largely contributed to the configuration of regional elites throughout the country's history, from the independence processes to the recent armed conflict, through the period after the assassination of Gaitán; Caldas has not been immune to this situation (Christie, 1986; Jaramillo, 2009; Rivas, 2016).

The Colonization of Antioquia.

Much has been said about this process in terms of the reasons that try to explain its development. One of the controversies that arise among the authors who have written about the aforementioned colonization has to do with the social character of the colonization. For example, the Manizalean political cacique Luis Guillermo Giraldo affirms that a difference must be established between colonization and foundation: colonization was popular, peasant and spontaneous;

the foundation was made by elites (Giraldo, 2015, p. 354). But the details of this process, exceed the purposes of this article.

The truth is that, either as initiators or as continuators, the economically and politically privileged sectors of Antioquia soon assumed the direction of colonization and its consequent dominance over the newly founded territory. Proof of this is the way in which conflicts of interest are resolved between poor settlers and the owners and heirs of the old colonial concessions, such as Aranzazu and Villegas, with the appearance of new actors such as the González Salazar and friends, a commercial company of rural properties that acted in defense of the interests of the legal owners (although not inhabitants or producers) of the properties. The struggle between Juan de Dios Aranzazu, heir to the aforementioned concession and, ultimately, President of the Republic, and the inhabitants of their territories, shows this relationship between possessors and dispossessed:

Doctor Aranzazu could not honor the previous Capitulators. The lands have been distributed but they are not the best or the closest, nor the ones with the clearest legal title. And he does not expel the settlers who did not reach land, but encourages them to continue clearing the forest and opening fields so that, when he can organize and claim them, he finds them developed and in production (De los Ríos, 1983, p. 435). [Own translation]

In the midst of these legal junctures, the municipalities of Caldas continue to be founded, many of them before the date of formalization of the department as an administrative unit different from Antioquia in 1905. And soon, in these municipalities, a group with economic and political power will emerge that will take the place of the old colonial structures and will establish a form of oligarchic domination that will mix large-estate forms of production with political power based on lineage, surnames, and tradition (Ocampo, 1972; Christie, 1986).

Now, the idea of oligarchy, presented by Ocampo (1972, pp. 13-22) and Christie (1986, pp. 37-47) from a Marxist perspective, explicit in the former and with the support of the latter, is based on the organization closed of the families that by the mid-nineteenth century already exercised political and economic control in Manizales and other municipalities of this region in an almost exclusive and excluding way, which resulted in the submission of other social groups and an eminently negative postulation of the aforementioned concept, according to Bobbio (1982).

This process would be strengthened by the rapid economic progress experienced by Manizales after 1850, when factors such as its strategic location and the civil wars of 1860 and 1874 contributed to this mountaintop town attrac-

ting merchants, miners and men from businesses from other latitudes to make investments there:

Thus, two stages are observed in colonization. The first includes the production of subsistence items on the settlers' plots during the first years, and when these products do not have a good market. The second comes from the appreciation of the land due to the increase in the market for subsistence agricultural products or due to the possibilities of the production of commercial items such as tobacco, sugarcane or grass for livestock (Valencia, 1990, p. 211). [Own translation].

This would economically and politically empower the aforementioned local oligarchy to the point that it would go from being an agricultural and latifundist bourgeoisie to becoming a commercial bourgeoisie (Ocampo, 1972), whose power would later increase with the arrival of coffee in the region, the importance of this product for the economic development of the country (Gallo, 1974), the dialogue that this allowed with the national political class through the National Federation of Coffee Growers (Christie, 1986; Ocampo, 1972), and the expansion of communication channels (Valencia, 1990).

The political class that is configured in the heat of these events is acquiring peculiarities typical of its Antioquian heritage (Jaramillo, 2009, pp. 242-243), but strengthened by its own future, which revolves around the community's character, with a strong influence of values such as conservatism, the Catholic religion and the feverish past of the muleteers, ingredients of the founding myth of a thriving race and different from those not belonging to said elite (Santofimio, 2006, p. 316).

Thus, a social structure can be evidenced that already has the characteristics of the relationship between leading and directed sectors, between an economically and politically dominant class and a dominated population, between an elite and the mass, between the oligarchy and the common people (Plato, 1986; Aristotle, 2004). A situation that can be traced back to the Spanish Colony itself, whether or not there are continuity ties between the old and new rulers, which is less important here insofar as, as Mosca (1984) and Pareto (1980), in all social formations there have been and are the rulers and the ruled. There were those who existed in the Spanish Reign, who were brought to America with some necessary adaptations, and there were, of course, those present in the indigenous society (Valencia, 2010) defeated by the colonizers. There were those in the State of Antioquia and there were later in its Southern province, then continuing in the era of the autonomous department of Caldas.

Formalization and Splitting of Gran Caldas.

On April 11, 1905, during the government of Rafael Reyes, the department of Caldas was officially created by Law 17 of that year, which in its third article reads as follows:

The Department of Caldas is created between the Departments of Antioquia and Cauca, whose territory will be delimited as follows:

The Arma River, from its source to the Cauca River; this upstream to the Arquía ravine, which is the limit of the Province of Marmato. The Robledo and Marmato Provinces will be included within the Department of Caldas, due to the legal limits they have today, as well as the South Province of the Department of Antioquia.

Paragraph. The capital of this Department will be the city of Manizales (Congress of the Republic of Colombia, 1905, p. 2). [Own translation].

Since 1904 a new territorial division for Colombia had been discussed, and this administrative unit finally called Caldas (previously it was called Córdoba) had been considered, among other things, as a way to separate the departments of Antioquia (conservative) and Cauca (liberal), protagonists of bitter armed disputes during the civil wars of the 19th century. "This proposal had been supported by the leaders Daniel Gutiérrez Arango and Aquilino Villegas, from the columns of *El Correo del Sur* and by Bonifacio Vélez, who had been Prefect" (Valencia, 2015, p. 45). The protest in Antioquia did not have the effect of reversing the decision, since "the elite of Manizales began to have autonomy from those in Medellín and managed to maintain the designation of the Department of Caldas as an independent entity" (López and Correa, 2012, pp. 190-191). [Own translation].

Despite the cultural affinities that can be found around coffee among the three great regions that this department united, there were profound differences between the leading sectors of Armenia and Pereira with the appointment of Manizales as the capital of the entire department. The truth is that Manizales at that time concentrated a good part of the merchandise traffic to and from abroad, it was still a commercial hub, it controlled the main commercial routes and, therefore, it lived a privileged moment in economic matters, which was ahead of the world and the other cities of the coffee region (Christie, 1986; Ocampo, 1972; Valencia, 1990).

In accordance with the above, the Manizalean leadership sought to make the leap from town to city, with the aim of achieving coherence between its economic moment and its national importance. In this regard, policies were

designed to improve the architecture and infrastructure of the municipality (Valencia, 2015, pp. 49-52), parallel to the promotion of literature, history, the exaltation of the Paisa legacy and other similar cultural activities, in order to achieve a degree of differentiation with claims of superiority, both in Manizales and in other nearby municipalities (Christie, 1986; Jaramillo, 2009), an idea very close to that of Plato's aristocracy (1986).

Strong economic groups continued to grow in the agricultural, coffee and commercial spheres, in parallel with the political dominance that they maintained especially in the Manizales area of influence and the claims of literary, architectural and cultural elevation (Jaramillo, 2009; Ocampo, 1972; Christie, 1986).

However, towards the beginning of the 1930s, Manizales was losing national position with respect to the four main cities of the country (Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Barranquilla) and even compared to neighboring Pereira with regard to industrial development (Jaramillo, 2008; Rodríguez, 1983). Although there were some industrial companies in Manizales, the real impulse to this sector of production began in the 50s, and had its greatest deployment in the 60s by the hand of a group of friends known as *Los Azucenos* (Ocampo, 1972; Jaramillo, 2008; Rodríguez, 1983).

Belonging to the traditional families of the city, these young people carried out business management tasks aimed at making Caldas and its capital the industrial epicenter of Colombia, as had happened before in the commercial and coffee sectors. The process was even accompanied by the necessary correlate of financial development with the creation of the Banco de Caldas, Seguros Atlas, the National Coffee Fund and, mainly, the Corporación Financiera de Caldas, in which the bar of *Los Azucenos* had great influence (Rodríguez, 1983, pp. 60-65). At the same time, the political class of Manizales made a commitment to maintain their class dominance in politics, for which they made investments in the creation of charitable, religious and union associations related to their ideas (Drake, 1973).

As a summary, it is worth saying that, in his study on industrial development in Old Caldas, Rodríguez (1983) shows the configuration of the business and political groups of Manizales and Pereira and concludes, in line with Coller (1999), that the Manizales oligarchy has always been more closed, contrary to that of Pereira, which may have repercussions on subsequent industrial developments in both cities.

However, the impulse quickly gave way to a great disappointment, the companies created or intervened were gradually extinguished or reduced to mediocre results and the industrial development of Caldas was left in a simple frustrated yearning. To this failure of the Caldense ruling class another problem

of enormous consequences for the recent history of the department was added: the separation of Quindío and Risaralda in 1966.

Several reasons are adduced to explain this event, among them the problem of the distances between Manizales and more remote sectors such as Quindío, the development shown by Armenia and Pereira in the face of the economic stagnation of the capital, the tensions between the conservative north and the southwest liberal, including factors associated with the period of La Violencia, the heroic self-proclamation of the managers of the “liberation” of Risaralda and Quindío, among others (Alzate, 1984).

But one of the decisive factors had to do with the exclusivist and gregarious nature of the Manizalean oligarchy, which has always strived to exclude the leadership of Pereira and Armenia from the important decisions of the department and to maintain economic control of the region that concentrated the institutions and the budget (Christie, 1986; López, 2011). This shows one of the perverse effects of what Mills (1987) calls monolithic elites, or Bobbio (1982) calls oligarchy, sustained in the classical tradition.

At this point, the concept of oligarchy continues to be useful to qualify the minority groups of power in Caldas, since they support their dominance in the economic position and assume aristocratic traits that, however, do not benefit the population, ergo they become a perverted form of it (Plato, 1986; Aristotle, 2004; Rousseau 2004; Montesquieu, 1984). However, the specialization of this group with respect to administrative management bodies makes the concept insufficient, which makes the category of political class more useful (Alcántara and Llamazares, 1997) and to a lesser extent that of the political elite.

The Political Class of Caldas After the Split

What was previously said is confirmed in this period (from 1980 to 2006) in the history of Caldas, when the different events will show the professionalization of a political class (Alcántara and Llamazares, 1997), albeit with elitist and oligarchic characteristics, far removed of the traditional sectors that best fit these denominations. As a result of the separation of Risaralda and Quindío, the political class of Manizales had a free hand to dispose of the new department at their whim (Jaramillo, 2009). The time of the *Grecocaldenses* or *Grecoquimbayas* had been left behind; now began the era of the *Baroque-Caldenses*, a way to call the ruling class that has its region as its own business:

The passage from the *Grecocaldenses* to the *Baroque-Caldas* coincides with the partition of Caldas, which shows that the old Caldas was national, what are created are provinces that lose national figuration. Added to this is the political

crisis caused by the robbery of Caldas, by senators Ómar Yepes, Víctor Renán Barco, Dilia Estrada, Luis Guillermo Giraldo, Governor Guillermo Ocampo Ospina and others, with whom a loss of interest occurs at the political level on the part of the traditional ruling class and a separation between those who manage private companies and those who manage public affairs (Jaramillo, 2009, pp. 244-245). [Own translation].

Here we express a way of pointing out the local caciques or *gamonales*, the most clientelistic way of managing politics in the regions, an idea supported by Peralta (2010, p. 188), for whom the barcoyepista hegemony is directly related to the social crisis lived by the department in the late 90s. This thesis contrasts with what was said by Christie (1986, pp. 119-133), for whom the power of the *gamonales* was reduced to the extent that the national State managed to make a greater presence in the regions, which occurred after the 1950s - something in which they coincide with Ansaldi (1991) and Becerra (2012).

The truth is that, regardless of the controversy, political power in Caldas from the 70's was concentrated in the hands of professional politicians, according to Bolívar (2002) influential at the national level and possessed of practically administrative and electoral control. Incontestable during the time of the so-called "*barcoyepista coalition*", a tacit pact between the Liberal and Conservative parties to distribute the public offices of the department for periods, especially the Government of Caldas and the Mayor's Office of Manizales; a kind of Caldense National Front (Sierra, 1998). The latter was also the cause of corruption scandals such as the one called *Robo a Caldas*, which did not have any important political consequences due to the loss of power by the class that held it (Jaramillo, 2009).

The enormous political power that Barco, Yepes and Giraldo managed to accumulate from the Senate of the Republic was such that they had a fluid dialogue with the National Government as visible heads and leaders of their respective parties, which had repercussions on the possibility of giving gifts in the municipalities of Caldas and that, in turn, resulted in the reproduction of their hegemony. The constitution of this elite, pluralistic in theory but monolithic in practice, had varied and negative repercussions for the department, among which are the questioning of the democratic exercise in Caldas, the fracture with the traditional elites, the consequent economic stagnation of the region and the popularization and roots of political practices such as vote buying and clientelism (Hernández, 2015, pp. 17-18).

The 21st century marked the beginning of the end of the *Coalition*, something that was expressed in the gradual loss of some minor mayors, then also that of Manizales, until losing the Governor of Caldas in 2013 (Hernández,

2015, pp. 25- 31). The explanation for this phenomenon is given by the electoral opening of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the erosion of the alliance, the retirement of the Senate chiefs and the emergence of new leaderships (Jaramillo, 2009, p. 247) promoted under the shadow of Álvaro Uribe, plus the conservative dissent promoted by Luis Emilio Sierra (Hernández, 2015, p. 26).

One more event that undermined the *Coalition*, especially with regard to the Liberal Party, had to do with the revelation of the relationships between politicians belonging to this community and paramilitary groups in the region, a phenomenon known as the *Parapolitics*. In this scandal, the then to-be heir to the Barco emporium, Dixon Ferney Tapasco, was condemned, also accused of being the intellectual author of the murder of the deputy editor of the newspaper *La Patria*, Orlando Sierra. Along with him, other members of the red party were accused and convicted, as well as members of the Partido de la U (Marín, 2011), one of the supposed new regional leaderships, which shows that the aforementioned alternative of power that these parties represented only it meant in many cases the return of the old oligarchies, now under an authoritarian discourse.

Apart from the false political renewal represented by the Uribista parties in Caldas, and with an alternative sector divided and without real options for victory, now the department finds that the old representatives of the *Coalition*, Omar Yepes, are returning to the political scene (La Patria, 2019a) and Luis Guillermo Giraldo (La Patria, 2019b), in a hopeless struggle between political elites that inevitably and sadly recalls the sentence of Marx (1973) in *The Brumaire Eighteen of Luis Bonaparte*: “history is repeated twice: the first as a tragedy and the second as a farce” (p. 408).

Conclusions

From this review, it can be concluded that the concept of oligarchy is usually the one with the greatest application by scholars of leading social groups, even if it does not conform to a rigorous definition in all cases, or if there are differences in its use between the theorists who apply it. It is still common to find definitions that tend to refer to the economic aspects of the leading sector, while others appeal rather to both this and the political factor, which is essential for this category. A derogatory use of the term oligarchy is characteristic of almost all authors, as was the case in classical Greece, which shows a semantic continuity that allows, at least in this regard, a certain degree of convergence.

The concept of the political elite does not enjoy the same fame that it has in the United States, despite the fact that it is generally associated with the concept of democracy, so developed in these latitudes. What can be added in this regard is that the Marxist school and other related theories have preferred a concept such as oligarchy (when not the most ideologically charged with the dominant class or bourgeoisie) to refer to the social sectors with political power.

In general terms, it could be observed that the conceptual differences are not actually so deep or categorical and that those who appeal to any of the aforementioned terms tend to do so interchangeably, sometimes even as synonyms. This confirms the relevance of the categories and analysis criteria taken into account for the realization of this article. The general reference, both in the commonly used sense and in the academic, points to a social group that has a privileged position in economic and sometimes family terms, and that is characterized by largely controlling the institutions from which political power is exercised. The relationship between this and economic power is usually interpreted as inherent to that of each of the concepts.

Despite this, the idea of assuming the concept of political class as the one most useful to characterize the Caldense political panorama is reaffirmed, insofar as it better expresses its concrete situation, especially the current one, without leaving aside that it does not end up being sufficient to expose the phenomenon, so the appeal to the concepts of oligarchy, elite and ruling class continue to be valid and, incidentally, justify the syncretism found in the bibliographic references.

Although concepts such as oligarchy and political class are regularly used in the Colombian context, not so many academic studies were found in this regard and, on the contrary, a good number of journalistic references were found, most of which make an application without rigor of these categories. This is an indicator of the use that the general public makes of concepts like oligarchy and political class, and shows a divorce between the press and the academy that results in the type of influence on common sense.

It can be seen that in Caldas, particularly in Manizales, there has been a closed group of political leaders since its foundation, a monolithic political class that has displaced other sectors from the possibility of governing. At one point in history, there was a split between the political class and the economic sectors, which led to Caldas having poor business performance and losing prominence on the national scene, with the consequent perpetuation of the aforementioned political group in administratively advantageous positions. Despite the change in the configuration of the political class in recent years, a panorama of plurality is not in sight, and rather it is observed how the old castes return to the public scene.

Finally, the use of the concept of political class is highlighted as the most suitable for naming the phenomenon addressed here, insofar as it emphasizes the aspect of the decision-making power of a social group over others, and encompasses the centrality of the ideas of the elite, the oligarchy and the ruling class. It is recalled that the term class does not have in this case the Marxist connotation that links it exclusively with economic aspects and refers to politics as the mere plane of the superstructure. It is also clear that there is still a lot still to be addressed in this area, for example the view of the political class from the Latin American perspective, particularly from decolonial studies, which may be the subject of future research.

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