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Sovereign plebeians: analysis of *plebs* and *people* in XVIII Latin America

“To what extent can we use these terms of recent appearance, whose antiquity does not go back beyond the eighteenth century, to designate realities before them? Can we use them in the same way that we say that men of the past breathed - without knowing it - a mixture of oxygen and nitrogen?” (Guerra 1998: 8).

Introduction

The modern era established a Western worldview that permeated all edges of how ontologically we understand and act in society. This in relation to the colonial experience in America opens a duality. The conquest not only colonized the imaginary of that time but also colonized the way in which we theoretically and methodologically approach certain phenomena such as politics. Studying the organization and colonial political relations is done in most cases from assumptions that are Western, and do not respond to the "reality" of that time. The proliferation of studies on this subject indicates that there is an awareness of everything we ignore in this period, but there must also be a reflection on the way in which we approximate its understanding.

It seemed that the ontological reflections that were made around politics were far from the Latin American experience and thus the colonial one, and were outside the research topics, taking for granted the use of fixed political theoretical terms. However, the construction of the political, the nation, the citizens, the notion of representation, should be central objects of contemporary reflection and it is necessary to see them in a contextual way and in territories with particular histories and experiences were and are different. Hence it becomes essential to rethink the notion of people since the conquest in the Latin American region.

There is an evident contrast in the protagonist actors and practices of one era to another. The modern political idea places *the people* as the main actor in the socio-political organization of the state. Contemporary studies have approached the people - but also as

a fixed signifier - to the extent that it works to explain other theoretical elaborations such as representation, political regimes and populism. The *people* is one of the central actors and terms that creates and examines the populist phenomenon. To study the people by itself is to go back to the creation of one of the main actors of social and political life. These generalizations that are made of the term do not escape the Latin American historiography, for which it is necessary to approach these theoretical constructs from the colonial experience. Are the faces of the people the plebeians of the colonial period? This is one of the questions of this research paper, which aims to conduct a conceptual reflection and a tracking of the notion of *people* and *plebs* in the XVIII century, as a way to reflect first on the political structure of the Old Regime and the nation states; and second on the way of how concepts belonging to modern political theory are used to explain experiences in distant contexts and places.

The analysis of the terms will be located in the transition from the colonial period to the creation of the nation states in Latin America, focusing on the political organization of the state. The goal is to be able to trace back the concept of the *people* (in its political definition from modernity temporarily located in the independences) to the concept of the *plebs* (in its social definition in the colonial experience). In order to explore if the imaginaries that make up the second concept are transferred and converted into the modern people, or created in parallel keeping shared particular meanings.

The study is presented as a conceptual review, where I will historically analyze how these concepts have been approached from certain selected authors and cases. Being a first approximation, a generalization of the phenomenon in Latin America could not be made, so it was decided to address it from two case studies in the countries of Ecuador and Peru. These countries were selected for both being from the Andean part, former territories of the Inca empire, and for having access to jobs that discuss the *people*. The work was raised in three axes. First, an approach was made to the notion of people from various authors. Rather than achieving a conceptualization, it was sought to land the different historiographic denominations that are given to it, and to problematize who it is spoken of when talking about the plebs. On this side, the work is based on the texts of Alberto Flores Galindo *Los Rostros de la Plebe* (2001) y *La ciudad sumergida* (1991) in the case of Peru; and for Ecuador –even though the bibliography on this theme is scarce- the work was done with the book of Martin Minchom *El Pueblo de Quito 1690-1810* (2007); the article of Rosemarie Terán Najas *La plebe de Quito a mediados del siglo XVIII: una*

mirada de la periferia de la sociedad barroca (2009); an the article of Roland Anrup and María Eugenia Chaves *La "plebe" en una sociedad de "todos los colores". La construcción de un imaginario social y político en la colonia tardía en Cartagena y Guayaquil* (2005).

Second, and in the same line the concept of people is approached. Thinking about the people from certain authors is only achieved since the construction of the nation-state, when *the people* is built as the detentor of the general will and sovereignty. It is here that a rupture is seen in the ways in which the word people is used, separated from other concepts that previously seemed synonymous as crowd, plebeians, mob, etc. As one of the objectives of the essay is to reflect and critique the use of modern political theoretical concepts to refer to the era of the colony, contemporary conceptualizations will be used for the analysis of the people concept. This section is based on the work of Francois-Xavier Guerra *Modernidad e Independencia* (1992) and *Los espacios públicos en Iberoamérica. Ambigüedades y problemas. Siglos XVIII-XIX* (1998); also Paolo Virno's *Gramática de la Multitud. Para un análisis de las formas de vida contemporáneas* (2003); and Alan Badiou's *What is a people* (2016)?

Once these notions were defined independently - but not exclusively -, to crystallize the "transition" a crossing was made in three edges, looking at the plebs and people from (1) their relationship with the authority; (2) from the representation and (3) from its antagonistic construction. Examining them in this sense allowed us to account for or not the mobility of the senses in the construction of these discourses from one era to the next. The acts of independence of both countries were used not as sources of analysis, but as an input that is temporarily placed in the middle, and as the discursive space where both senses can be captured and intertwined. In this sense, the analysis will be carried out by triangulating the information of the bibliographic review and the minutes.

The faces of the plebs or the plebs without face?

Prior to entering into a characterization of the plebs in the territory of what we now know as Ecuador and Peru, general definitions will be drawn for these subjects in colonial experience. It must be thought that when talking about plebs, we are referring to collective entities, groups and possible social classes that after the conquest entered a new process of classification and creation of imaginaries that placed them in a certain position in relation to the other actors and subjects in the colonial experience. In general, Latin American historiography has understood the plebs as the social actors located on the

periphery of colonial society. If we refer to its etymology, the plebs, from the Latin plēbs and the Indo-European root ple, it refers to magnitude. San Isidoro de Sevilla (560-636 AD) in its Etymologies, Book 9, "Dē Cīvibus", says: [...] the people are all civilization, the common people (vulgus) are really plebes. The plebes are named for their plurality, since the minors are more numerous than the elders" (Valentine). So the plebs are understood as common, by the crowd, but also by common in the sense of vulgar. (Araya 2011: 311)

According to the Royal Spanish Academy³³ (2014), the plebs are defined as "the common and low people of the town", the "populace", "plain state", and as "in the past, the common social class, outside the noble, ecclesiastical and military". The Dictionary of Covarrubias of the seventeenth century does not record the term plebs, but it does for plebeians defining it as "the low man in the Republic, who is neither a knight nor a gentleman nor a citizen" (826, cd. Araya 2011: 311). Already these first definitions denote the use of the people concept to define the plebs³⁴, to see it as the lowest social class of colonial society, which is antagonistic to the nobles; the plebs are the humblest and simplest portion of society. The denomination also referred to castes in society, certain castes were seen as part of the plebs; like certain jobs, such as artisans and farmers. Although plebs may be the term that prevailed, it is remarkable the conjugation of this with others as a crowd, multitude, lower people; in certain occasions they are used as synonyms, and in others as mutations of the term and referring to other classifications such as servants, vagrants and idlers.

Lima and its plebs

The terms referred to in this work are definitely not fixed, nor can they be conceptualized through non-mutable meanings. Nevertheless they define a particular reality in a

³³ This definition was found on the website of the Royal Spanish Academy in the search engine where it gives the definitions of several dictionaries over time. Recovered from <http://web.frl.es/ntllet/SrvltGUILoginNtlletPub>.

³⁴ There is a tension between the concepts of plebs and people from their first definitions where we can see the cross between their meanings. For the references that are made in this sense, that is to say the "plebs as the lowest of the people" we will understand the people by the Dictionary of Authorities in 1737, which defines it as "the place or city that is populated with people" (RAE 2014). This definition is not the one that will be problematized throughout the work, rather it is an argument argued as territorial to refer to the people as a habitable space for various subjects.

particular time. The subjects of the plebs live in a rigidly static society, where social mobility was blocked (Flores Galindo 2001: 28). Flores Galindo (2001) states that when talking about the faces of the plebs, the profile of the popular classes of a colonial society is drawn in their daily lives, that "colonial society is seen from below: from those desperate who, paradoxically, are ultimately who sustain it "(61). The people is materialize in relation to their offices, the negative characteristics that are registered to them, and their needs.

The plebs in Lima seen from the castes, is the largest number of the population, and they are "people who are completely immoral, without education, or principles of honor that contain them in the just limits of their duty" (Flores Galindo 2001: 72), they are excluded and belittled subjects, who live between legality and illegality. They could not be given a particular face, and although they are sometimes easily identified, other subjects are grouped together in the same common sign; the deserters, sailors, stowaways, lazy, idle, tramps, people without fortune. They are also associated with ethnic terms, certain mestizos - depending on certain characteristics - can be from the plebs, as well as zambos and mulattos. The fact that they are positioned between legality and illegality, or formality and informality, refers for example to free slaves or blacks who were considered plebe. Likewise, it is related to their trades, street traders, sellers, who work in a kind of parallel economy were also considered.

The faces of the people were exemplified in their shortcomings and in the pejorative aspect of their denominations. From the abstract to their daily lives they were always seen as men *without*, without political culture, without values or virtues, without religion, without trade. The use of negative adjectives made it easier to crystallize the understanding that was made of the plebs, the denominations made references to the disaggregated mass that was the town's people. The heterogeneity of this term is one of its main features, however many times it was lost in its name given the large population that made "enter" in this category.

The term had an obvious derogatory connotation, which was sometimes not enough, so it was accompanied by some adjective, such as vile, tiny, "abundant and always harmful sheaf", "low sphere." [...] Synonym of populace and people. The commoners defined themselves because, in a society that sought to comply with a strict social stratification, its members lacked permanent occupations and offices. But, apart from a fragile economic condition, they opposed the aristocracy by living outside the "culture":

there was no school, no teachers for them; they were - as Pablo Macera pointed out - illiterate because education proved to be one of the most precious class privileges "(Macera 1977; Flores Galindo 2001: 75-76).

The negativity attributed to this concept built them not only as a part of society, isolated and negative, but a threat as they related to the rest of the social groups. During the eighteenth century a deterioration in the economy led to plebeians increasing in number in Lima and building their lifestyle next to the popular classes. There was a new mix, an insertion of more people to the plebs, making it a "heterogeneous conglomerate composed of mestizos, mulattos and blacks who differed from the racial homogeneity preserved by the aristocrats" (Flores Galindo 2001: 80). The mixture achieved two effects: on the one hand that the popular class and the dangerous class were seen as synonyms - attributing them a violence that was not necessarily real-; and on the other that as the plebs permeated more spaces in the city, the aristocracy felt that it had to be fervently differentiated from it.

The separate worlds that were built since the beginning of the conquest were strengthened. The same plebs term, which refers to commoners, is the antithesis of the noble and aristocratic. Although not only the Spaniards were part of the nobility, and the indigenous and peasants of the plebs, sometimes these generalizations were made in these territories. Not only were they abstract differences given by certain imaginaries, but in practice and in everyday life they were visualized in their physical space, in their interactions, trades, education and even leisure.

The plebs of the Ecuadorian territories

It is important to stop at the particularities of these collective entities as the territorial spaces that would later form the Latin American nation states were formed; since although the imaginaries treated in this work are generalizable through the colonial experience; for the eighteenth century it is not necessarily the same to speak of a Peruvian commoner than an Ecuadorian. In this sense, we rescue Minchom's research on the people of Quito in the 17th and 18th centuries. The plebs are understood, again as "the populace", the inhabitants of the popular neighborhoods, but in a city different from Lima, with a strong local identity, mainly due to its isolation (Minchom 1994). Likewise, this author makes a difference when studying the plebs, since it ensures that in Quito it is not possible

to see it from a caste society because of the fluidity of ethnic categories, but rather that it is necessary to rely on a model from social classes (Minchom 1994).

The Quito nobility, first referred to a small elite of Spaniards was increasing with the formation of the artisanal urban sector and the broadening of social barriers, the categories of mestizo to indigenous were growing, but their mixture gave way to a Creole elite; and from there the nobility was built. The author emphasizes this sense, since unlike Flores Galindo, he establishes that both the indigenous and mestizos were within the plebs, and that by moving away from the unique categories of Spanish and indigenous; the nobility integrated indigenous elites and the plebs also integrated poor Spaniards. Flexibility in class categories means that the author does not put particular faces on the people, but rather builds them in relation to their social position and economic relations. You can talk about informal networks, and trades more aligned with the idea of people like the silversmiths, weavers, barbers, and a certain type of peasantry.

By focusing on a socio racial dynamic, Minchom uses the *Declaraciones de Mestizo* to refer to the plebs³⁵. Although the author does not do a systematization exercise when describing the particular cases, the following can be elucidated on who would integrate the Quito plebs: men and women - unlike the Peruvian texts, women's faces appear on several occasions-, crafts: silversmith, shipper, teachers, barbers and servants; mestizos and Indians; descendants of chiefs; poor (Minchom 1994). Although the author makes reference throughout the text about the plebs, at no time defines it per se.

Rosemarie Terán Najas analyzes the Quito plebs from the periphery of Baroque society, placing social actors on the edge, in a condition of marginality, but with the ability to change the ideals of the colonial "order." Attributes to the Quito plebs an overflowing presence in the daily life of the city, which gives importance and a position in the historiographic study of the colonial experience, but at the same time defines it for its "indecipherable nature of its social composition (resistant to social classifications and categorizations)" (Terán Najas 2009: 101). The author states that the subjects that make up the plebs were not always marginal. It was a group of society difficult to define but that had a co-optation mechanism through its economic clientele relations, patron-client

³⁵ The author refers to the voices of the plebs and focuses on describing appeals not to pay taxes, taken from testimonies at the Audience of Quito from 1686 to 1800. He catalogs these testimonies as the plebeian counterpart to the Spanish concern to "blood cleansing" (Minchom 1994: 192). However, it fails to make a more narrow definition or approach at the end of the plebs.

relationship, and that in the years before the 1765 rebellion, there was “a transition of people from the plebs, from the sphere of corporate and clientele society, to the sphere of marginality and illegality” (Terán Najas 2009: 103).

Her points follow the line of the aforementioned authors, however, when working the plebs with an emphasis on otherness, that is, how it is constructed in relation to the nobility, it makes an interesting approach about the cohesion of the plebs in its marginal position. Marginality, seen as a space of social undifferentiation, is filled with people whose demands for survival are pushed to the limit but which in turn “foster links that go beyond conventional family ties, compassionate or clientelist ties, and at the same time, they overcome ethnic barriers” (Terán Najas 2009: 107). The networks of complicity are then related to this idea of a marginality that leads to the creation of a cohesive group. Marginality leads to a space of indifference, much more open. The people who integrate then, we can say that they experience particular marginalities, as for example in the case of women, the women of the plebs are single, divorced, concubines, people who could not be integrated.

When referring to the people of Guayaquil, we will do so from the writing of Roland Anrup and María Eugenia Cháves. The differences that could be pointed out in relation to Guayaquil, would be that the authors do see the Guayaquilean plebs from the “caste people”, thus defining it as “a heterogeneous population and “of all colors”, which was intended to be grouped into a whole that was homogeneous and therefore controllable” (Anrup and Chavez 2005: 94). Rather than defining the plebs, they problematize this category in relation to the factors that allowed it to emerge as a social and political imaginary in the 18th century Spanish colonial, since they claim that it does not have “a stable, definable sociological reality, but emerges as a social force in coyuntural or fortuitous circumstances and that its corporeality as a social entity is ephemeral and difficult to grasp” (Anrup and Chavez 2005: 115).

The rebirth of the people

Two terms, two different moments in the same century, one in transition to the other. The revised approaches around the plebs are through the colony with an emphasis on the end of the 18th century but also address the mobilization of the plebs in the time of independence. It is in this temporary space where we settle to approach the people. The Dictionary of Authorities (1737) establishes 3 definitions: (1) “the place or city that is

populated with people"; (2) "set of people who inhabit the place"; (3) "it is also called the ordinary and ordinary people of some City or population, as distinguished from the Nobles. Latin. Plebs Vulgus". The people of Latin *populus*, in the imaginary of the eighteenth century, was either used to refer to a place where people live - and in this sense you can talk about several towns, spaces- or to refer to the common and ordinary people of the city, not nobles. In this sense, plebs and people can be seen as synonyms. It is with the Enlightenment, the crystallization of modernity and the French Revolution that modern concepts of politics³⁶ arise, changing the role assigned to the individual and the people acquires a new significance.

Paolo Virno's theorizations about the people and the multitude serve as theoretical crossings - in this work - between the concepts of people and people. While Virno does not refer to the term plebe per se, he does so of multitude³⁷. The concept of people, despite its multiplicity and ambiguity, is completely codified from a political-philosophical reflection since the 17th century, where the notion of people prevails over that of the multitude (Virno 2003: 44). The multitude vs. people debate falls back on the fact of the organization, returning to Hobbes, the multitude being a plurality, is negative and coincides with the dangers of returning to the natural state and impeding the construction of the State. On the contrary, the people is a reflection of the state, there cannot be one without the other (Virno 2003: 13-14). The crowd lives privately, while the people converge on state unity. The private seen as "private"³⁸, dispossessed or lacking, which is devoid of voice, the many have no face and are far from the public sphere. While the people do not shy away from political unity but create it, it echoes individuality to integrate individuals into a sovereign political body.

Now we will delve into the conceptualization of people from modernity. Paolo Virno did not propose a necessary transition from multitude to people, but rather an

³⁶ Politics will be defined as "the relations between the men who constitute society and their cultural codes, whether those of a group or a group of social groups at any given time, since every social relationship has a fundamental cultural content" (Guerra 1992: 352).

³⁷ There is no use of the concept of Virno's multitude as the colonial plebs, but rather a parallel in the ideas of the crowd in relation to the people according to the author to introduce the second concept.

³⁸ It should be emphasized that there are different conceptions - also - to understand the public and the private in relation to the people. Although Virno uses the private to speak of deficiencies, if we refer to Annick Lempérière, she defines the public as the people. Term that relates only to the Old Regime, the public was not the abstract and "sovereign" people but "the set of inhabitants of a city or town; It was also what was done in view of all and not in private (Virno 2003: 55). Virno, attributing the private to the crowd, attributes the public to the people, but in senses that are not equal.

antagonism -which could be a way of approaching the people and the people-. We will move away from this discussion but we will argue about the need that the author posed to move from a faceless crowd to a people capable of creating a political unity; arguing a superficial crystallization of this assumption in independence processes.

This period is characterized by its revolutionary character, given that the revolutions - begun by the French - are seen as a “radical transformation of social and economic structures, or as access to the power of a new social class” (Guerra 1992: 12) . The change in the epistemological framework, from where man was seen in society and therefore the political organization was given by the ideas of the Enlightenment and materialized by the French Revolution, which were then mobilized to the cases of Spain and America³⁹. The social pact established in the Old Regime, which raised a political and social relationship, king-subjects, changed when it passed from a collectivist society to an individualist. Modernity creates a new man who is individual, “detached from the links of the former state and corporate society; the new company, a contractual company, arising from a new social pact; the new policy, the expression of a new sovereign, the people, through the competition of those who seek to embody or represent it (Guerra 1992: 13).

New actors emerge in the sphere of the public and political, actors that were already in this space, but new in the sense of their significance. The legitimacy of the political structure is broken when the authority⁴⁰ of the king vanishes and gives way to look for new forms of legitimacy established in the new vision of the nation that includes the sovereign people. Guerra states that it is the first time that one can speak of political actors, since they are created within the framework of the new politics (Guerra 1992: 14). The Old Regime, with the victory of absolutism, establishes a relationship of the state with

³⁹ It is pointed out that the “ <<French ideas>> are far from being the only ideas of Independence, and many historians have revealed the role played by classical Spanish political thought in these events” (Guerra 1992: 19).

⁴⁰ We will understand the authority from the concept of Hannah Arendt (Rivera García 2002), where the authority demands obedience and implies the establishment of a hierarchical relationship between the author and the people who obey, the importance of hierarchies is recognized, since they provide permanence and stability to political life, and it is linked to a tradition that unites the past and moves society away from the insecurity generated by the incessant change. Relations in politics cannot exist without authority or legitimacy.

society, which is binary, where they are sovereign-subjects. Representation⁴¹ institutions emanating from the State are created, and this whole system is the one that breaks with the revolutions. These being a materialization of the new ideology installed with modernity, make a projection of the whole society of the structure and operation of the new sociabilities. The image of a social pact -existing- is changed by a social contract that arises from individuals –and not from the king-, which is egalitarian, from a homogeneous nation, formed by freely associated individuals, with a power out of itself and subject at all times to the opinion or will of the associates (Guerra 1992: 24).

The classic political theories are born from the Aristotelian idea that the human being is naturally social and therefore will belong to a group. This group that has a pact with the king also has rights and duties -which are reciprocal- so it is understood that it limits in some sense the power of the king. However, this people is still inscribed in a stately and monarchical organization, imaginary that was not completely extinguished at the stage of the transition, but the abstract idea of modern and sovereign people had to work in practice with “the very concrete and complex people of traditional society: the multiple social groups that do not belong to the world of the privileged ”(Guerra 1992: 87). Traditional actors are combined with modern actors, preventing a direct relationship between the imaginaries that are made of certain concepts as people and the values of a human group, its internal structure and functioning. The modern people are organized based on the idea of modern politics, a social contract and a newly won sovereignty that will guarantee the common good of their society. However, before the links were not of personal choice, but (1) birth to a specific group, kinship ties, (2) belonging to a town, manor or estate - understood in the notion of territory and belonging; (3) ethnic group; (4) personal decision, but “the individual who voluntarily joins a group or body of the Old Regime, is not free to set the rules or modalities of belonging” (Guerra 1992: 88).

Although the term people is a central concept or word in the political vocabulary of the 19th century, it does not have an equal meaning for all those who would have to integrate it, and its definition “is one of the main objects of political struggles” (Guerra 1992: 353). According to the author, the people have different meanings, they can refer to

⁴¹ Guerra throughout its text elucidates the concept of representation, but we will also refer to it as a subject that acts on behalf of others, regardless of their interests, must pursue the interest of their constituents, in a combination between negotiation and commitment , where the conflict should only be justifiable in terms of that interest (Pitkin 1985).

the whole of a society, the population within a territory, or it can also refer to the real part of that population, "whose borders are difficult to define: the whole of people or social groups that do not belong to the world of the powerful; the "people" as opposed to "those above", to "patricians" to privileged groups" (Guerra 1992: 353). This concept is mobilized and the people is associated with the commoner, vulgar, populace. "It is therefore a social definition -the lowest classes of society, fundamentally urban- but above all cultural" (Guerra 1992: 353). This concept could be taken to the concept of the eighteenth-century plebs, an actor potentially present in political life but who opposes the "good men", when the discourse of civilization/barbarism is already being established. The plebs are typical in the cities of the Old Regime, however it is difficult to think in terms of modern politics, nonexistent at the time.

This work transits between two epochs, the colonial experience and the modern experience, and reflects on how one looks at the other around the political. In this sense, to finish the theoretical section, a brief reference will be made to certain contemporary notions of people. Alain Badiou (2016) states that the substantive people born with the French Revolution is currently a neutral term and should be viewed contextually, as well as its adjectival to the "popular" that responds to the emancipation crusades. To talk about the "people's people" refers to the part of the "non-existent" population that although they are part of the people are not entirely constituted within the sovereign people. These people, seen as the mass, were the poor commoners, as opposed to the aristocracy and the nobility, who were the society itself seen by the state (Badiou *et al.* 2016: 28). The people are an imminently political category, which has two positive points of view, one that will promote the creation of a desired state denied by the existence of some other power -refers to the colony-; and another that, in an existing state, will seek to emerge as a new town (Badiou *et al.* 2016: 31). It is definitely created in relation to the state and it is in transition stages, like the wars of national liberation where it takes its form.

Following the line of Badiou, Giorgio Agamben (1998, ctd. Sanín Restrepo 2012: 12) states that the people in modernity means two things; or else the entire political body, the sovereign, the "all" who own the general will; or "the marginalized and condemned, the "no life", the "homo priest", those who are de facto and de jure excluded from the exercise of politics and law". There seems to be a contradiction in the definitions, however it is not, this responds to what the author calls the anatomy of modern politics. There is a construction in relation to the difference, which needs to be able to exist to create a border

that excludes "something", the exclusion of passage to cohesion. The creation, again, dichotomous of the people responds to a matrix, that of modernity/coloniality. The "totality of the people" would become a fallacy, since for the people to be complete, they must feed on the outside that is abandoned.

This small theoretical review of the terms put into question in this research paper allows us to establish what are the assumptions from which we place ourselves to make sense of them. Although both categories have an extensive conceptual reflection, in this first approach to semantically rethink the people, specific authors have been selected to guide the discussion.

Independence in paper

On what material support could the transition from the Old Regime to the nation-states be embodied? It was decided to work with the acts of independence, arguing that they are the first formal declaration of independence. In terms of content, the minutes themselves are short instruments -at least those examined for Ecuador and Peru- which first appeal to the new sovereign people, establish specific guidelines that would exemplify the first changes or breakdowns of a regime to the other, and they are full of names of the characters that are proclaimed as authorities in the independence and that in turn seek that new legitimacy for their sake to hold the representation of the power of the people. These corpus will serve as inputs for our analysis, both to the extent permitted by the text but more in relation to the context where the speech was produced, its enunciators and recipients. For this reason, before entering them, it is necessary to contextualize them.

The invasion of Napoleon to Spain in 1807-8 leads to the abdication of Carlos IV in favor of his son Ferdinand VII and the creation of a General Meeting that acted in the name of Bourbon continuity. "This series of events raised, in an acute and tangible way, the question of where the legitimate authority fell at a time of serious imperial crisis" (Minchom 1994: 261). The Quito revolt was the mirror of the society that produced it, it was an event planned and executed by the aristocracy to which the popular classes later joined. The first Autonomous Board of Spanish America was founded, and a call began by means of manifestos or public declarations against the officers, certain peninsulars, but still affirming loyalty to the king. The group of patriots of August 10, 1809 was headed by Juan Pío Montúfar and rebelled by writing to the act of installation of the sovereign government board. However, the rebellion did not last, they were arrested and in 1812

the Spanish authorities were restored. "The rebellion of 1765 had its origins in the popular neighborhoods and not in the parishes controlled by the elite. The revolt of 1809-10 was instigated by the aristocracy, but there was also a deep popular opposition to peninsular authority, and to what was perceived as an army of occupation. However, the Creole leadership made little effort to take advantage of this feeling of the people "(Minchom 1994: 272-273). It could be argued that although the first attempts of independence -1809- did not integrate the Quito people, before and after this we see an uprising and immersion of it in the riots, but this denotes not an appeal of the patriots/elite to the people or a joint work of both subjects, but an action led by the interests of each group⁴².

The act of independence of August 10, 1809 is considered the "first independence of Spanish America" (Minchom 1994, Pérez Ramírez 2010), was created by the patriots and a scribe in the Royal Palace. From the original copies were made that began to circulate, a means by which the patriots sought support for their cause (Pérez Ramírez 2010: 220).

Although independence came from the hands of Creole elites, the insertion of the plebs of Lima in the wars of independence was more noticeable from the beginning. Rumors of what was happening in Spain alerted both the elites and the commoner that was rising in various popular riots (Flores Galindo 1991: 171). From the neighborhoods, groups organized to begin looting bakeries and shops, a feeling of fear towards the crowd was created; but at the same time an anti-Spanish sentiment that momentarily united the popular groups of the city, the same "derives, in reality, from an anti-colonial sentiment that tends to identify Spain with slavery" (Flores Galindo 1991: 173). Although Peru remained faithful to the Spanish monarchy, pre-independent movements were formed that inflamed the Lima people and were co-opted by San Martín and Monteagudo. In July 1821, with the immediate presence of the Liberating Army, the independence of Peru, Spain and any other nation was declared (Biblioteca Ayacucho 2005: 45).

The act as a founding act expresses the desire and decision of the people of Peru to be free. San Martín brings together the Open Cabildo, announces its proposal that is

⁴² The definition that was made of plebs integrated both Quito and Guayaquil notions, when we moved to the Act of Independence, although the protagonists are mostly from Quito, both in the riots and with the writing includes the population of Guayaquil, it is important to make this clarification, to understand why it is generalized speaking of Ecuador.

accepted and the document is written by Manuel Pérez de Tudela (a lawyer, notable and political agent of San Martín) (Bákula 2018: 38). The first proclamation was in Huara and then on July 28 in Lima. It was an open event, it was proclaimed before the Lima society and a “response and commitment from the population of the guilds and the fundamental institutions” was requested to swear “to sustain and defend the independence of Peru, the Spanish Government and any other foreign domination” (Bákula 2018: 39-40).

Crossing senses around the people

The conceptual reflection of the plebs and people terms is done by triangulating the information analyzed throughout the study. The theoretical notions of the authors based on both denominations will cross by themselves and through the analysis of the acts of independence, in relation to three categories: (1) authority; (2) representation; and (3) antagonism. These aspects - which will be treated as categories of analysis - emerged from the conceptual revision as keys in understanding the plebs and the people from the political sphere in the colony and the republic.

From the monarch to the people

How do you go from being the lowest social class in society to becoming the sovereign, owner of the general will? The transition to the republic raised a transfer - from the theoretical - of the royal authority to the popular authority-. The social pact of the Old Regime is transmuted into the modern social contract, and the king-subject relationship is changed to the people through their general will. The people are thought of as homogeneous, despite their notorious heterogeneity - visualized in the plebs; and it is believed that there will be a magical transition from the sovereignty of the king to the nation, when the actors and institutions of the Old Regime still kept a traditional imaginary. The colonial experience did not stop creating institutions and intermediary personnel, who now feeling part of the people were seeking to adopt the empty chair of lost authority. There is no doubt that the mob was inscribed in the structural networks of the political organization, however it was always kept on the sidelines, away from charges that were only intended for “citizens who considered themselves worthy -(based on) social status, reputation, moral, virtue, and good manners- (Lempérière 1998: 58).

The people can organize themselves to implement their sovereignty, or they begin to draw new characters that quickly appropriate the new rules of the game,

understanding that to be leaders they will have to call the people. Going back to the moment of independence embodied in the minutes, the crystallization of this idea is denoted. The logic would be that in proclaiming independence it would be the plebe-people who did it. The antecedents prior to the installation of the autonomous boards account for a mobilization of the population and support for liberating ideas but mobilized for other objectives. The plebs were not fighting for independence in themselves, but trying to enter the political game from which they were always excluded. Although their performance is crucial and necessary in these historical events, in the cases of Ecuador and Peru, it is clearly visible that they are not the main actors. The independence is realized, and seen from the historiography, achieved by the new Creole elites -that although at first they are still loyal to the king- then they separate realizing that the new ideology allows them to be the sovereign.

The plebs remain invisible, but now it becomes useful, both in the particular moment of independence, and in the installation of the new modern imaginary of politics. The planning, execution and proclamation of independence is carried out by specific actors who keep a kind of parallelism in the action, it seems that they work on two sides, on the one hand the elite and on the other hand the plebs mobilizing; in a moment they cross -it would appear spontaneously- and independence is achieved, but one cannot speak of a joint and popular feeling.

The patriots of liberation call the people, "publicizing" and socializing the acts. In Ecuador, the plebeian sectors of the population entered the independence process after 1809, but in Peru they did so from the beginning. However, the scope of the call cannot be assured. Looking only at the discourse created from this support, the word people is not used on many occasions, in the act of Peru it is not visualized, in that of Ecuador once, but reference is made to the general will. The enunciators are constructed in an us that is inclusive: we, we choose, we name, are used repeatedly in the Ecuador act; and in this it differs from the Peru act where although there is an us it is in the limit. Linguistically it does not refer to an us, but it gives voice to the people by means of naming it indirectly; "que la voluntad general está decidida...", "personas que habitan en este capital", "que expresen" ... all this different from saying that "we express", "that we inhabit".

But who are the ones we choose or those who express? It is here that the modern idea of the people is lost. The people are all, plebeians, elite, and that all must voluntarily choose an authority. The elite collects this idea but symbolically self-name themselves as

the new authority. It is necessary to build a homogeneous town that is apt to assume the political responsibilities that correspond to it as the legitimate holder of sovereignty (Guerra 1992: 19), and those responsible for this construction are the enlightened that emerged from the Old Regime, they would become a peaceful and "correct" notion of the people (Hebrard 1999; Virno 2003; Guerra 1992) who must take authority until the true sovereign can do so. Seen from the acts, it makes sense that these documents are mostly the exposition of names that, through their presence and signature in this official document, legitimize independence. Part of the nobility and the state institutions, the *cabildo*, the clergy. The position in which they are appointed represents the order of their hierarchy that, when taken to paper, does not break -as one would think- they are legitimized as the new actors in modern politics.

Although, perhaps, the population of the subaltern classes called *plebs*, changes a few degrees in society, it is based on a pragmatism that establishes new power relations based on the traditional regime. In this particular moment of independence, in the case of the selected Latin American countries, one cannot even speak of a sovereign people, but only of a change of authority, and a change of terms and meanings attributed to denominate this relationship.

Representatives and represented

The notion of authority is directly related to that of representation. It is understood as the action of creating a symbolic and material subject that is the representative of the new sovereignty and the general will. The representative of the Old Regime was obviously the king, and in turn he was represented in the new territories. Modern politics also inaugurates the idea of the citizen, it is understood that the people are made up of citizens, a person who is recognized by the State through their duties and rights with society. The representation is executed by vote, the people elect their representatives through the establishment of suffrage. However, not all people are citizens, and this is clearly seen when at the beginning, the application of the vote is limited to only a part of the population⁴³.

⁴³ Although we will not enter into a discussion on the forms of representation and therefore voting, it is important to emphasize that the suffrage said as universal was not embodied in this way from the beginning. It was mutating throughout the conformation of nation-states, first including only men who can read and write and gradually broadening its spectrum.

The principle of representation, anchored in the social contract, assumes that society delegates its sovereignty to the representatives. An active citizen emerges, which in theory emanates from the "ignorant plebs" and the "enlightened elite", and creates a problematic: what part of the people-population was called to exercise sovereignty? Although the citizen "refers, not so much to the elementary component of the nation, but rather to the independence of the individual and his dignity" (Guerra 1992: 356), not all are citizens or have the same rights. Citizenship didn't include the minors, the servants, the women, the slaves, those who suffer condemnation, but that citizenship is the most glorious and respectable attribute in the new republic, therefore, it is attributed only to the illustrated part of this illustrious society. So, the plebs became the citizen people? Yes and no, in theory the notion of people is established, everyone should be able to vote, logically plebs are included; but in practice if the citizens are not the servants, women, slaves, etc., then the plebs remain excluded, only now based on a modern rational political logic⁴⁴.

This restricted conception of the political people, has a modern character that positions the "owners and literate men" as the only ones who can conceive the general interest of the country (Guerra 1992: 357-358), and allows them a progressive selection of the elected thanks to their social influence. In other words, the traditional structure is still in force despite the fact that societies took a political leap to modernity. This is explained "in the articulation between the world of modern politics, that is, that of the elites grouped into different forms of modern sociabilities, and a society governed by values and links of an old, corporate or community type. (...) The intellectual mutation of the elites does not prevent society from continuing to see their traditional authorities in them and ensure their modern election through a collective vote governed by ancient ties" (Guerra 1992: 359). The idea of universal suffrage, in practice, is restricted to the elite, not only in the act of voting but in elections, in fraud and therefore in representation. How to explain them? On the one hand, because there is a contradiction between the

⁴⁴ When the practice of suffrage is just beginning, it is very volatile and responds to the interests of those who want to be voted on. Although most of the time the suffrage was reduced, there were sometimes where the need to appeal to the people was more necessary and therefore the suffrage was extended. "Despite the limitations that reflect the distinction between nobles and commoners, so typical of the Old Regime, or that of the people and elites, so marked in the mental universe of the Enlightenment, the curious thing is that constitutional provisions lead to a definition of the extremely wide political people (Guerra 1992: 357).

autonomous vote of the modern individual -independent of the others- and a society composed of collective actors of the old type. Therefore, the only citizens, in the sense of modern politics, "are the members of the elites who have internalized their status as citizens, that is, the modern democratic culture" (Guerra 1992: 361). On the other hand, because the -partial- traditional character of these elites shows that power is still thought of as concentrated and unified.

In the discursive network of the transition, the words plebs or mob are still used to refer to the barbarians who rebel, but at the same time they use the people when they speak of representation and sovereignty -"the deputies of the people, following the present criticisms of the nation (...) (Ecuador 1809 independence act)- then the attribution of the quality of "people" to the real actors varies, but the system of symbolic transfer of the will of the people to one or more men is the same, the People's deputies (Ecuador independence act) are characters of the Creole elite, but not the faces of the people. The objective of the liberals was to transform traditional society into a modern town. A remodeling of traditional society was necessary, which prevented the logic of the people from endangering the social order. Practical and theoretical limits to the sovereignty of a differentiated people were thought and set.

Is the representation "false" to the extent that the plebs remain marginalized? Or do modern ideas begin to develop and use or deepen the differences, in order to maintain it in the theoretical and practical change of power? The people is built at a conceptual level by the elites, as a means to create a transformation that will end the traditional system but that will not take away their privileges. For this reason the plebs remained the people, because they had to see it as a group of the population that was inferior, so that even if the sovereigns gave their representation to someone who "could" think of the common good of society, they would not be them.

The plebs vs. the people, or the nobility vs. the elite

Why talk about antagonism? Referring to authority and representation allowed us to focus on one of the essential features of politics, how power transits in a society and in whose hands. Despite the creation of these categories, plebs and people have both political and social overlaps, and in responding not only to abstract assumptions but to real subjects, they are loaded with important identitary notions to rescue. The encounter of the Western culture with the aboriginal cultures of the territories now known as Latin

America, created throughout its history subjects built in a dichotomous relationship present from the beginning. The categorizations of plebeians and nobles mobilized from the Western imaginary to the conquered and were filled with the subjects addressed by both Flores Galindo and Minchom. There is a parallelism in the construction of these social classes that is then established in the political imaginary, giving way to rigid and immobile structures.

The nobility needed an opponent to create itself as a mirror, and for this reason the plebs were in many cases built in negative terms. There was also a need to create antagonistic borders, which were then taken to the republic. The sense of order -in force in the nation-states but different- was established from the colony, with concepts such as 'the police', the 'good government', which legitimize the apparatus of domination in order to civilize the barbarian classes of the population⁴⁵. This dichotomy transmutes at the stage of transition to the republic, seen from the political point of view and as established by Hébrard (1998: 198), a triad of the ignorant people, the illustrated elites and the corrupters of opinion. We will not go into the subject of opinion but we will stop in the first two categories. The civilization/barbarism debate started in the colony and crystallized in the modern era -with its scientific aspect- it mobilizes to politics in the sense that the need for an authority also stems from the recognition that there is a class of the population that is superior to the other. The superior class is illustrated, and the way to reach the common good, is to voluntarily accept this assumption and delegate sovereignty to these people who will best represent them. Semantically and in practice the nobility became the elite and the aristocracy on the one hand; and on the other the pleb -which was always mixed with the people- became the people.

It is interesting in this sense to integrate the idea of the private, seen from the conception of Virno that is to say of the needs. Virno (2003) relates the multitude to the deprived people, not only of material needs but of rational imaginaries that doesn't allow them to integrate into the political sphere. Flores Galindo (1991, 2001) and Minchom (1994) return to this idea when talking about the faces of the people, in relation to people who had critical situations because of the amount and depth of the deficiencies they have, being one of them education. The construction of people in modernity also integrates this sense, although the people being sovereign should not be lacking, they are the whole; the

⁴⁵ Civilization/barbarism debate.

existence of needs is used by the elite who wants to come to power in two ways, on the one hand to reinforce the idea that they are necessary –necessities equal to ignorance- and on the other in a kind of appeal and use of these shortcomings to call the people in their favor.

Let us return to the acts of independence. Although discursively they do not talk about needs, the battles for liberation integrate the lack of freedom, and this was taken as the banner of independence speech - directly related to the modern notions of the individual. When San Martín asks those present at the Royal Palace to take an oath, it is the performance of the appeal to fight for something that they did not have. Returning to the antagonism, it is also represented in these documents to the extent that there is no "formal" face of the plebs in them.

In this sense we return to the ideas of Agamben and the debate of heterogeneity-homogeneity enters into discussion. To be built, borders must be created, since the totality will only be total in relation to what is left out. What is within the discourse personified in the minutes are the traditional elites of the Old Regime, in their attempt to become the new actors of the new space. Although allusion to the people is made with the use of words as a nation (Ecuador Act) and the general will (Peru Act), the appointment of representatives is made by them and the representatives are them. It could be said that the status of invisibility that was given to the plebs is also "formalized" but it is mobilized to the people, if there is any kind of claim from the abstract and symbolic, it is not reflected in the minutes nor in the independence as historical fact. The plebs postulate a certain heterogeneity, it is difficult to define it because it is not a caste, a social group, or a specific group, they are diverse people crossed by the same colonial experience and by attributed characteristics that unite them. The people is not homogeneous, but it is considered to be so that it can be unified in its will, and a form of unification is the sharing of deficiencies and similar characteristics -in this sense the plebs are converted into a people as heterogeneity mutates in a sort of chain of equivalences. However, it remains heterogeneous, as it expands, the people are not the people, the people are integrated into the people, because theoretically the people are "all."

Conclusions

The objective of this research work was to carry out a conceptual tracking of the term plebs in the colonial period and the term people in the period of Latin American

independence, both moments in transition with the other at the end of the 18th century. The rationale for analyzing plebs/people was based first on being able to rethink the term people from their bases, since it is generally used as a secondary term in political theory, that is, it is important in relation to being treated epistemologically with politics, regimes, representation, etc., and not because of its ability to be an individual imaginary. And second to reflect on the theoretical look that is given to politics in the Latin American colonial experience. It was based on the assumptions of Francois-Xavier Guerra that already discusses how Western political terms are used to understand and account for phenomena that happened in distant territories and worldviews.

As one worked on the one hand with modern concepts of the people, and on the other with historiographic visions on the people, it was impossible only to approach it conceptually since the actors and practices studied began to speak on paper. In this way the final reflections will go that way, about the transition process itself, and the way in which it is theoretically addressed.

Is it correct to say that it goes from plebs to people? Yes and no. The plebs and the people are one in seeing them as physical and symbolic subjects, and they are different in thinking them theoretically. Both concepts constructed in relation to an antagonistic nobility and elite, seen as empty signifiers, are filled by people located in the lowest position of society. Not so many distinctions are made in this regard, when thinking whether the plebs have social or racial distinctions, but rather their heterogeneity is given by the ability to bring together various subjects in the colonial experience on the basis more than anything to what they lack. In this sense we realize that the plebs passed to the people, it is not exactly the people -because ideally we are all- but the marginalized actors continued to be accepting the denomination of people in modernity. From the conceptual point of view they are not the same, the people -only seen from modern politics- is the new sovereign, it is a homogeneous mass with the power and will to determine the political organization of society. However, we realize that this was not really the case. Only the plebs concept became obsolete as the era of the nobility passed, therefore other terms such as crowd and mass became relevant.

Recurring through the study it seems that more reference is made to the elite than to the people, although this was not the objective. This can be seen as contradictory but in the end it makes a lot of sense, since it portrays the impossibility and failure to establish in practice the modern political notions in both the colonial and independentist

experience of the Latin American region. The people as an epistemological actor plays a key role in political theory, but seeing the facts of independence we realize that these were mostly executed from the new elite, and that the romantic idea that Latin American peoples -or Ecuadorians and Peruvians- got rid of the Spanish regime is not entirely real. The foundations created in the colonial experience that established an unequal society that subalternized particular collectives, did not change with independence or nineteenth-century ideas about the will of the people.

A contemporary approach was necessary to reflect on it. While contemporary theories can be made to fit pre modern actors and practices, much is lost in the exercise. The colonization brought a colonization of thought, which materialized in the structure of society and its hierarchy, there is no doubt that traditional ideas make a direct relationship with colonial events. It can be argued that the same thing happened in the transition to independence, the ideas of the French and later American revolutions were mobilized both in Spain and in Spanish America. No longer from the colonizers, but from a Creole elite -already own- it was continued with the practice of adapting models outside our realities. It could be an explanation as to why the plebs did become the people, but the people never became sovereign. Could this mean that the theories on which modern politics are based fail? If, for example, the concept of citizen, born in Europe but led to the colonial experience -in transition- could not crystallize, can lead us to rethink it in its entirety.

To think that the transition from a collectivist to an individual society was going to be immediate realizes the abstract and practical problems of understanding a society "westernized by dominance" of a one western in essence. For this reason it was important to approach the plebs, because the people is a modern imaginary, an abstraction of the illustration, but the plebs are the faces of colonial subjects, of those who are not given a voice, only talked about. Approaching the *other* bases of certain concepts may allow a conceptualization that helps to account for current problems whose beginnings seem to be at the ontological foundations of the state.

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