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# The Genesis of the Term "Latin America": Historiographical Debate and the Birth of an Idea

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**Abstract**

This article aims to review the historiographical discussion surrounding the individual authorship of the idea and the name "Latin America", revisiting the main authors on the subject: John Leddy Phelan, Arturo Ardao, and Miguel Rojas Mix. All three scholars situate the emergence of the adjective "Latin" within a historical context marked by French imperialism—presented as benevolence through the ideology of Pan-Latinism—in Spanish-speaking America. Although they agree on the time and place of the birth of both the idea and the name (France under Napoleon III), they diverge on who was responsible for its creation. Phelan views the label as a unilateral product of French imperialism, later adopted by Spanish-speaking Americans. In contrast, Ardao and Rojas Mix argue that Latin Americans living in France coined the expression. However, while Ardao attributes the creation of the term to the Colombian journalist José María Torres Caicedo (1830–1889), Rojas Mix contests this, claiming that the Chilean Francisco Bilbao (1823–1865) was the first to use "Latin America." Still, Rojas Mix's critique—that Ardao ignored Bilbao—is insufficient to invalidate Ardao's thesis, as Bilbao employed the term "latina" merely as an adjective, not as a noun. Moreover, it was Caicedo who both popularized the expression and contributed to establishing its meaning in the form that prevails today.

## 1. Introduction

*La Raza de la América Latina*
*Al frente tiene la Sajona raza*
*Enemiga mortal que ya amenaza*
*Su libertad destruir y su pendón*

(Torres Caicedo, 1856)

> *Hace tiempo, repetimos, ha llegado para este continente la hora de su emancipación intelectual. Porque es necesario nos convenzamos de que, si los pueblos de América se alzaron, el espíritu, el pensamiento, la conciencia ha permanecido en un estado de servilismo deplorable. No así la América del Norte. ¿Cuál es la razón de tan notable diferencia? (…) ¡Porque son LIBRES DE ESPÍRITU!*
>
> (Bilbao, 1863)

The term "*Latino/a*" (Latin in English) is used worldwide as a well-known marker of cultural identity. Despite its Italic and Roman origins, it is rarely associated with Europe in common sense. This word acquired its globally recognized meaning in the region of the Americas south of the *Rio Grande*. Although most people take the term *Latin America* for granted, the notion that this part of the world stretching from Mexico to Patagonia deserved a specific designation has not always existed. Its origins date back to the 19th century, after the independence of the former Spanish American colonies. The conception of a union between all these colonies into a large, strong, and sovereign unified territory was a dream of revolutionaries like Simón Bolívar. Back then, in the 1820s and 1830s, various names were used to designate this group of countries, such as *Hispanoamérica* or *Grancolombia*, for example (Bolívar, 2012, pp. 193-200; Frizzera, 2022, chapter 3; Nauroski & Rodrigues, 2018, pp. 60-61).

When the unionist project failed and Spanish-speaking America fragmented into several smaller republics, the original vision of political unity shifted to one of cooperation and mutual aid (Ardao, 1980, pp. 99-107; Gobat, 2013, p. 1350; Rojas Mix, 1991, pp. 63-65). This new vision led to the emergence and consolidation of the idea and name of *Latin America* in the 1850s and 1860s. The process is a topic of debate among historians. Was the term invented by Europeans or Latin Americans? Who first used it, and why? What do the disagreements among scholars who addressed these questions reveal about Latin American identity today? This text explores these questions without seeking to offer a definitive answer.

This essay examines the most influential 20th-century historians who have addressed the **individual authorship** of both the term and the idea of *Latin America*. It consists of a bibliographic review of the historiography on the subject, culminating in a critical analysis of the scholars' conclusions. By comparing the perspectives of these authors, the study aims to demonstrate that the thesis proposed by Arturo Ardao presents the most plausible explanation for the emergence of both the idea and the name *Latin America*.

### 1.1 Structure

The present article is divided into five parts. In addition to this introduction, the next three sections are devoted to the presentation and critical analysis of the perspectives of historians **John Leddy Phelan**, **Arturo Ardao**, and **Miguel Rojas Mix**[1]. Following a chronological approach, the second section examines the work of the North American historian John Phelan, whose article "**Pan-Latinism, French Intervention in Mexico (1861–1867) and the Genesis of the Idea of Latin America**", published in 1968, had a significant impact on studies concerning the emergence of the concept. In this highly influential work, he claims that the term *Latin America* emerged in 1861 in the context of Pan-Latinism, a French enterprise that aimed to embody the recently independent Spanish-American republics under the "Latin" guardianship of France.

In 1980, the Uruguayan philosopher and historian of ideas Arturo Ardao published the book "**Genesis de la idea y el nombre de América Latina**", which disputes the thesis that the term was created by the French, arguing that the name of Latin America was invented by the Colombian intellectual José Maria Torres Caicedo in 1856. In 1991, the Chilean historian Miguel Rojas Mix criticized Ardao's conclusions in his book "**Los cien nombres de América**", where he pointed to fellow Chilean Francisco Bilbao as the creator of the term three months before Caicedo. Sections three and four of this paper critically summarize the ideas of Ardao and Rojas Mix, respectively.

The critical analysis of the opposing theses of Ardao and Rojas Mix is the theme of the fifth section, which revisits their arguments concerning the use of the term "*latina*" in the writings

[1] The historiography on the subject goes well beyond these three scholars, but here we prioritize those authors who discuss the origins of the name and the idea of *Latin America*, particularly through the debate surrounding the authorial creation of the term. Nonetheless, we draw on the contributions of other thinkers such as Walter Mignolo and Michel Gobat to enrich the discussion on the current meanings of the term *Latin America*.

of Caicedo and Bilbao.[2] I point out that the disagreement between the two historians arises from the fact that Rojas Mix does not distinguish between adjectives and nouns in the course of his analysis, something crucial to Ardao's argument. Furthermore, Rojas Mix interprets the fact that Bilbao rejected the new terminology after the French intervention in Mexico—in contrast to Caicedo, who maintained it—as a point in Bilbao's favor since he would be the one who gave the term its current anti-imperialist predicate. Ardao, on the other hand, interprets Bilbao's rebuff as an indication that he used the new designation only as an adjective. He also claims that it was Caicedo who contributed not alone to the consolidation of the idea and the name of Latin America, but also to its current meaning of solidarity against U.S. imperialism.

## 2. John Leddy Phelan and the Imperialist Pan-Latinism of France

### 2.1 Defining Pan-Latinism

Phelan's central thesis is laid out in the opening lines of his article *Pan-Latinism, French Intervention in Mexico (1861–1867) and the Genesis of the Idea of Latin America*, where he states that "Nomenclature in the Americas has often reflected in a symbolic fashion some aspirations of European powers toward the New World" (Phelan, 2018, p. 279). In other words, the names used to define parts of the Americas symbolized European ambitions and interests. Phelan argues, then, that the term *Latin America* was not coined endogenously, but rather imposed by colonial discourse.

According to Phelan, France was the main colonial power challenging British global dominance in the 1860s, under Napoleon III (1852–1870). French expansionism led to projects in places like the Suez Canal, Indochina, and Mexico (Phelan, 2018, p. 280). These colonial ventures were justified by **Pan-Latinism**, an ideological framework that promoted a cultural and political union among Latin language peoples around the world. **Michel Chevalier** (1806–1879), a prominent engineer and economist influenced by **utopian socialism**, was one of its key proponents. He was also an early advocate for constructing a canal through Panama, merging seemingly conflicting ideals: humanitarian progress and European imperial interests. From this perspective, imperialism could benefit both Europe and humanity at large.

[2] We employ certain terms in Spanish because the formation of *Latino* identity is embedded in a broader process of collective consciousness construction among Hispanic-American intellectuals, rendering the Spanish language central to the discussion.

Pan-Latinism was informed by the racial hierarchies of 19th-century Romantic Historicism, as seen in Chevalier's adoption of a tripartite European racial classification: Protestant **Anglo-Saxons** (England and Northern Europe), **Slavs** (Eastern Europe), and Catholic **Latins** (French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians). These "cultural blocs" were depicted as rivals for global influence, offering competing visions of progress. In this framework, France was to lead the Latin bloc, replacing the decadent Spain and Portugal (Phelan, 2018, pp. 281–282).

This narrative cast France not as a colonial aggressor but as a **protector** of Latin culture against Anglo-Saxon (British and later American) encroachment. In the Americas, the United States embodied this threat, prompting France to claim a civilizing mission: defending "Latin" peoples in the Americas from Anglo-Saxon dominance. This rhetorical strategy underpinned **French intervention in Mexico (1861–67)**, the primary political manifestation of Pan-Latinism.

Chevalier strongly supported Napoleon III's military venture in Mexico, portraying it as a way to halt Anglo-Saxon (the U.S.) expansion at the *Rio Grande* and preserve Hispanic America's Latin identity (Phelan, 2018, p. 283). Napoleon saw the Americas as vital suppliers of raw materials for European industry, and viewed U.S. expansion as a threat to French economic security. France's intervention was thus framed as both a defense of national interests and a mission to safeguard the Latin world (Phelan, 2018, pp. 283–286).

The French venture in Mexico would end up resulting in a grand disaster[3], but the pan-Latinist ideas propagated in France through pamphlets, newspapers, and brochures proved to be less ephemeral than the political pretensions of Napoleon III. (Phelan, 2018, pp. 287–288). Notably, some French writers and journalists who did not openly embrace Pan-Latinism expressed its ideas implicitly, especially when commenting about the Mexican campaign. (Phelan, 2018, pp. 290–292). Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol, for example, criticized Napoleon III's methods in Mexico but not Pan-Latinist ideals themselves (Phelan, 2018, pp. 292–293). Yet critics of the Mexican enterprise, such as Edgar Quinet, exposed the hypocrisy of claiming to defend Latins while waging war in Mexico for financial motives. Émile Ollivier, for instance, noted that France could not include Mexico in its Latin regeneration plans, as its population was largely indigenous and mestizo. Pan-Latinism emphasized Mediterranean culture and Catholicism but implied racial ties that Mexico did not fit (Phelan, 2018, pp. 293–294). Catholicism, therefore, was the main

[3] France sent troops to Mexico and, with the support of Mexican conservatives, imposed the Austrian Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg as Emperor of Mexico in 1864. The majority of the Mexican population and the liberals led by Benito Juárez resisted, and were later supported by the United States. France was forced to withdraw in 1866 and Maximilian was shot dead in 1867. See: De la Torre Villar & Camacho (2012).

connection between Mexico and France, but religion failed to unite the French and Mexican agendas[4]. Although the conservative Mexican clergy initially supported the French intervention to restore its colonial privileges, France instead advanced a post-revolutionary liberal form of Catholicism. No agreement was possible. (Phelan, 2018, pp.294–295). In migrating from the philosophical and speculative domain to a concrete political context, French Pan-Latinism suffered a significant defeat in Mexico.

### 2.2 When would the French have named Latin America?

Phelan claims that while Chevalier formulated the idea of Latin America, he was not the creator of the name itself—which he never used in his writings or speeches. The term appears to have first surfaced in French in **1861** in the pan-Latinist magazine *Revue des races latines*, in a column by **L. M. Tisserand** discussing recent events in the Latin world. According to Phelan, "between 1861 and 1868 the new designation was used by only six French authors and two Hispanic-American authors of long residence in France" (Phelan, 2018, p. 296).

Although France's project ultimately failed, both Pan-Latinism and the new adjective for Spanish-speaking America endured—largely because the blame was placed on Napoleon III, not on France itself. In subsequent years, new variations of Pan-Latinism emerged, including an anti-Germanic version in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Despite efforts to move past the failed intervention, the idea of a "Latin" America persisted as part of France's ideological legacy.

Interestingly, Phelan devotes little attention to the fact that *Latin America* was being used by Hispanic Americans in France. He briefly notes it but does not explore whether these individuals were simply echoing a trend or actively shaping the term's meaning. This question, overlooked by Phelan, later became a focus of inquiry among South American historians from the 1980s onward.

## 3. Arturo Ardao: shifting the dominant perspectives

### 3.1 Classifying the Americas

In his seminal *Génesis de la idea y el nombre de América Latina*, Arturo Ardao provides substantial evidence that at least two Hispanic Americans used *América latina*[5] before 1861. While he agrees with Phelan that Napoleon III's France plays a key role in the process, Ardao

[4] On the role of Catholicism in the construction of the name of Latin America, see Ayala Mora, 2013.

[5] In this article, sources originally written in Spanish are used. The quotes are translated into English, but Spanish terms are occasionally employed if they clarify the meaning of the original text.

differs by considering both sides of the Atlantic to grasp the Latin American perspective. Whereas Phelan focuses exclusively on 19th-century France, Ardao traces the development of the term by also examining the colonial and independence periods in the New World.

Ardao places special importance on the shift from adjectivization to substantivation—when "Latin" stops merely qualifying "America" and begins functioning as part of a compound noun with its own designating power. To understand this process, Ardao first seeks to grasp the noun *America***,** which has evolved, according to him, in three stages. In the first, following European arrival, neither the name nor the concept of the continent exists. In the second, the idea of a singular place begins to take form, though unnamed. In the final stage, a proper noun emerges to name and give meaning to the region (Ardao, 1980, p. 16). Once the noun *America* was established, the new nomenclature carried both a symbol of unity (a single continent) and of plurality (this continent is plural and diverse). This plurality varies based on the criteria used. Ardao highlights four ways of classifying America: geographic, geopolitical, linguistic, and ethnic. (pp. 18-19).

The **geographical criterion** refers to the cardinal classifications South and North America. This duality, expressed in Spanish as *América del Sur* and *del Norte*, influenced the emergence of a geopolitical classification: South America encompasses everything south of the U.S., while North America includes the U.S. and Canada. This division was widely used in 19th-century historical texts, amid the growing political opposition between the U.S. and its southern neighbors (Ardao, 1980, pp. 19-20).

The **linguistic classification** is based on the official European languages of American countries, a legacy of colonization. There were four main Americas: English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. This language-based division is also political, as terms like "English America" and "Spanish America" persisted after independence. In Spanish, they are *Angloamérica* and *Hispanoamérica*. The latter sometimes included Brazil[6], although *Iberoamérica* became more common to refer to Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries combined[7]. (Ardao, 1980, pp. 20-21).

[6] Some boastful Spanish nationalists argue that Brazil belongs to *Hispanity* because ancient Hispania included both Spain and Portugal—thus framing Portuguese and Spanish cultures as jointly Hispanic. This view often serves to position Spain as the cultural center of Latin America. See: Rojas Mix, 1991, pp. 167-168; Espinosa, 1918.

[7] The term refers to the Iberian Peninsula, where both Portugal and Spain are located. This designation is more accepted because it does not give centrality to the Spanish. However, it is still criticized for being Eurocentric and ignoring the Indigenous and African languages and cultures.

The final classification is **ethnic**: Anglo-Saxon America and Latin America, or *América Sajona* and *América Latina*. This dichotomy reflects the European ethnic groups that shaped American culture (Ardao, 1980, p. 21). Unlike linguistic or national divisions, this one is based on what Ardao calls ethnic conglomerates: Anglo-Saxon America refers to the English-speaking region, linked to Northern European Saxon peoples; while Latin America includes Spanish-, Portuguese-, and French-speaking areas, heirs of Latin and Mediterranean cultures from the ancient Roman Empire.

Ardao observes that even racial classifications are shaped primarily by culture. Anglo-Saxon America denotes regions marked by Saxon culture, while Latin America refers to those shaped by Latin culture—both defined by their respective European languages. Thus, there is no clear separation between race, culture, and language, with language classification prevailing. The boundaries between these elements and geography are likewise blurred. Ardao concludes:

> This is why ethnic-cultural plurality has linguistic-cultural plurality as its immediate antecedent. But this, in turn, also has geopolitical plurality as its immediate antecedent, which, in turn, finds it in pure and simple geography. Each of the four pluralities presented in the order in which they have been presented is, therefore, the historical and logical basis of the one that follows (p. 22)

In other words, the four categories used to classify the Americas are deeply intertwined. Ethnicity is derived from the dominant European languages; linguistic division, in turn, is preceded by the geopolitical division between the United States/Canada (North) and the countries stretching from Mexico to Patagonia (South)—a distinction that can also be linked to geophysical classifications. Based on these observations, it is possible to reduce the four classes into two broader dimensions: geophysical and geopolitical on one hand, and linguistic and ethnic on the other. Ultimately, all paths lead to a duality—a dichotomy: South America or Latin America versus North America or Anglo-Saxon America (Ardao, 1980, p. 22).

This insight clarifies why French-speaking Quebec was never incorporated into Latin America. Since this nomenclature could implicitly describe *South America* (in the broad sense that includes the large area from Mexico to Patagonia), Canada does not fit. **To be part of Latin America, therefore, it is not enough to speak a Latin language, but also to be part of it from a geopolitical point of view**[8].

[8] For a perspective on the subject from Québec's point of view, see: Bouchard, 2000.

The ethnic-cultural duality (Latin vs. Saxon) that emerged from this historical process was the only one not to arise organically, but **deliberately**. In other words, the noun *Latin America* (and its counterpart, *Anglo-Saxon America*), unlike terms such as *North America* or *Spanish America*, was intentionally coined—a "product voluntarily pursued" by Spanish-speaking American elites who made a sustained effort to "define their historical identity" (Ardao, 1980, p. 23). Ardao concludes:

> The term "Latin America," as a compound noun, designates the entire group of the Spanish, Portuguese, and French-speaking Americas. But as such a noun—beyond the mere adjectivation initially established by the French—it emerged in the Spanish language among Americans for whom this was their mother tongue. Even more, at first, its creators applied it exclusively to Hispanic America, taking this term in its restricted sense; that is, to what was also called—now by its language of expression rather than by its colonial status—Spanish America. Little by little, they themselves, and those who followed them, extended it to the entire area of those three Neo-Latin-speaking Americas. (p. 23)

Here is a key difference between Ardao and Phelan: Ardao credits the French with the adjective "Latin" but sees the noun *Latin America* as a Hispanic American creation—emerging from a long, collective effort by Creole elites seeking a self-definition since the Independence Era, well before French Pan-Latinism arose. **The convergence of Hispanic-American aspirations for identity and French ambitions for a profitable imperial project ultimately created the conditions for the rise of both the idea and the name *Latin America*.**

**3.2 La France et la Latinité.**

Ardao understands *Latinidad* as having a double meaning. The first one denotes the cultural world surrounding the Latin language in the Ancient European period and the early Middle Ages. The second one refers to the cultures developed around the languages descended from Latin, called neo-Latin (Ardao, 1980, p.31). Latinity is said to have expanded through five successive waves from its small geographic center in the central area of the Italian peninsula. These expansions can be summarized in five major historical forms: Roman, Italic, Mediterranean, European, and global. The first three forms refer to the Roman Empire in Antiquity, the fourth to the formation of the neo-Latin languages throughout the Middle Ages, and the fifth to the modern era and the global expansion of Latin languages enabled by European navigations.

The idea of *América latina* could only have emerged in the 19th century, as it was during this period that the notion of a *Europa latina* also came into being (Ardao, 1980, p.34). Whether in the American or European context, the term *latina* presupposes a dualistic opposition with the North. In the European case, this dichotomy was articulated through the contrast between the “Roman” and the “Germanic”[9] worlds. During the Middle and Modern Ages, this duality was embodied in the designation *Sacrum Imperium Romanum Nationis Germanicae*[10], so named because it encompassed a territory extending from northern present-day Germany to central Italy, thereby including both “Latin” regions in the South and “Germanic” regions in the North. This Romania-Germania duality, therefore, had already been operating in Europe for some time, without having ethnic or racial contours. It appears in 19th-century historiography in the influential historian Ranke's book *History of the Latin and Teutonic nations, 1494-1535*, published in 1824. And even Hegel in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History (1822-1830)* uses this distinction in his conclusions. (Ardao, 1980, pp. 35-36).

Like other European nations, France had its local version of the Roman–Germanic dichotomy. The notion of “two races”—the Gallic (Roman) and the Frankish (Germanic)—previously seen as a source of historical conflict, was gradually supplanted in the first half of the century by a unifying conception of a singular “French race”, idea defended by French intellectuals such as Thiery and Michelet in the 1830s and 1840s. While it is true that other European nations also adopted the language of national races, the French took this discourse further:

> (…) it was France that led the **recognition of the national race solely as a subset of a broader race: the Latin race**[11]. Nor was it a conception of race grounded in rigid biophysical criteria, as would later be emphasized by the sociological naturalism of positivism. The prevailing **linguistic principle**, characteristic of the Romantic spirit in this regard, remained the foundation. (Ardao, 1980, p. 41)

In the second half of the century, a substantial "Latinist" bibliography began to emerge, comprising books, newspapers, and magazines. It was in the context of this intellectual wave that Pan-Latinism took form. The notion of a “latin” Europe was a consequence of this process, in which European Romanness gradually gave way to a more global Latinness, incorporating both

[9] There are several terms to refer to the peoples of Northern Europe: Germanic, Saxons, Anglo-Saxons, Teutonic, etc. The main point remains: these names are used in opposition to the Roman or Latin Southern Europe.

[10] Known in English as the Holy Roman Empire (800–1806).

[11] All bolded text within quotations has been added for emphasis and is my own.

the Latin peoples of Europe and those of the Americas within a shared framework (Ardao, 1980, p. 42)

The contrast between a supposedly backward Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking South America and a rapidly modernizing English-speaking North America was articulated in the writings of prominent European thinkers such as Hegel and Tocqueville. However, the figure who initiated the transition from narrowly ethnonational gentilics to broader historical-cultural identifiers—though still rooted in ethnic conceptions—and first advanced the dual terminology of *latin* America and *saxon* America, was, as Phelan already mentioned, Michel Chevalier, who traveled to the Americans between 1833 and 1835, visiting the U.S., Mexico, and Cuba (Ardao, 1980, pp. 43-46). This trip resulted in the book *Letters on North America* (1836). Despite employing national gentilics, he does so from an ethnic viewpoint and a broad historical and global perspective—describing white Americans as part of European civilization. He contrasts what he sees as the ingenuity of the English-speaking populations with what he refers to as the "powerless race" of the Hispano-Americans:

> It appears that the Anglo-Americans are called to continue directly, without any exterior intervention, the series of progress that **the civilization to which we belong** has pursued since it quit the old Orient, its cradle. It is a people that will be a source, and perhaps, what rules there today must soon be eclipsed by another. While the HispanoAmericans seem to be nothing more than a **powerless race that will leave no heritage** (…) (Chevalier, 2017, p. 426)

In the introduction to the same book, Chevalier states:

> **Our civilization proceeds from a double origin, the Romans and the Germanic peoples**. (…) there is a latin Europe and a teutonic Europe. The first includes the peoples of the South. The second includes the peoples of the north of the continent and of England. The one is Protestant, the other Catholic. The one uses idioms in which Latin dominates, the other speaks Germanic languages. **The two branches, Latin and German, are reproduced in the New World**. **South America is, like southern Europe, Catholic and Latin**. North America belongs to a Protestant and Anglo-Saxon population. (2017, p. 24)

Ardao identifies in these passages the emergence of the idea of a "latin" America. It appears initially as an adjective, analogous to the same descriptor applied to Europe. Chevalier

employs it, as Phelan had previously noted, for imperialist purposes: he envisions France as the rightful leader of the Latin group in opposition to the Germans/Saxons. Although he articulated the idea of Latin America, he stopped short of creating the name. This task would fall to a Colombian residing in France: Torres Caicedo (Ardao, 1980, pp. 60–61).

### 3.3 *América Latina*: A Hispanic-American compound noun

If, on the one hand, the adjective *latin* was initially applied to Europe, on the other, its substantivation never took place there—or in any other part of the globe—except in America. Ardao suggests that this occurred because the former Spanish-American colonies were the only place in the world in which the expression encountered a latent, pre-existing supranational consciousness. There was a convergence between nationality and continentality. If the "Latin" segments of other continents did not perceive a need for a continental definition, neither did those continents require a (supra) national definition. This dynamic emerged uniquely in Spanish-speaking America (Ardao, 1980, pp. 65–66). However, if a latent collective consciousness already existed among the Spanish-speaking American peoples, what was still needed for this vague sense of belonging to evolve into a shared identity—one that could be expressed through a term to designate the group more clearly and cohesively? What was missing was an external Other that was threatening enough to make an abstract feeling more tangible and concrete. **This Otherness was found in the figure of the United States.**

The backdrop for this development was the dramatic military expansion of the United States, first into Mexican territory and, subsequently, across Central America (Gobat, 2013, pp. 1352-1364). Under the influence of Romantic historicism—which emphasized races as the primary agents of historical progress—the success of the United States came to be increasingly attributed to the Saxon race. In response, Hispanic American elites adopted the term *latina* in direct contrast to *sajona*. Opposed to the America of the Saxon race stood an America of the Latin race. **We witness, then, the transformation of *América latina* (lowercase letter) into *América Latina* (uppercase letter)**. **In other words, an adjective undergoes substantivation and becomes a compound noun** (Ardao, 1980, p. 67; Gobat, 2013, p. 1360).

This process did not unfold without significant doses of racism. For most of the European-descended Hispanic American elite, being *Latino* largely meant being white. Countries such as Haiti and Brazil had their Latininity questioned not only because they were not Hispanic, but also due to the large proportion of inhabitants of African descent (Gobat, 2013, pp. 1370–1374). Elitist and racially charged from its inception, the term *Latin America* would nevertheless come to be broadly accepted and adopted by different social sectors over time — including liberal and

socialist intellectuals — eventually acquiring a revolutionary and leftist connotation (Rojas Mix, 1991, pp. 370–382). However, this progressive and anti-colonial meaning has also been present from the very beginning, when the term was first used by its creator. Ardao asserts that the Colombian journalist and writer **José María Torres Caicedo** (1830–1889) was the originator of the name, attributing him not only its designation but also its theoretical connotation:

> Torres Caicedo is, in fact, as we have been able to verify, the Hispanic American who, with the earliest awareness of his historical future, applied to *Nuestra América* – in Spanish – "the adjective *latina*," to repeat here his own words of 1875; an application of the adjective quickly converted, by him, into the name of *América Latina* (p. 74).

Born in Bogotá, Caicedo was a poet and political journalist in his native country before moving to Paris to focus on his health. He settled permanently in Paris in 1853, returning to Colombia only sporadically. From France, he established a long career as a journalist, writer, diplomat, and politician. He was widely recognized for his work in the European centers of his time, at one point reaching the position of the most well-known and representative Hispanic-American intellectual in Europe (Ardao, 1980, pp. 74–76).

Caicedo likely encountered the French Latinist discourse of Chevalier and his contemporaries shortly after he arrived in France. In 1875, the Colombian claimed to have used the new term since 1851; however, available evidence only confirms its use as early as 1856. During those early years, he tended to favor expressions such as *América del Sur* and *América española*, while already denouncing the expansionist policies of the United States in Mexico and Central America (Ardao, 1980, pp. 77-78). In June 1856, he published criticisms of US foreign policy in *El Correo de Ultramar* newspaper, stating that the Anglo-Saxons were "absorbing" the Spanish race in America. The solution to this, according to Caicedo, would be to revive Bolívar's project: **a confederation of the Spanish-speaking nations of America** (Ardao, 1980, p. 80). Rather than merely adhering to contemporary French Latinist intellectual trends, it is evident that Caicedo aligned himself with Simón Bolívar's unionist vision and his primary concern lay in preserving the Hispanic-American integrationist project envisioned during the Independence period.

Finally, on September 26, 1856, Torres Caicedo composed in Venice the poem *Las dos Américas* (*The Two Americas*), considered the symbolic **birth certificate of Latin America**. In this work, the Colombian author declares:

But isolated they stand, divided,
These peoples born to be united:
Unity is their duty, their law is to love:
The same origin and mission they share;
The race of Latin America,
Faces the Saxon race,
A mortal enemy already threatening
To destroy its freedom and its banner.

(Torres Caicedo, 1857).

Ardao identifies in this poem the first reference to *América Latina* as a noun stating that "beyond any very personal biographical episode", Torres Caicedo's invention "was the generational outcome of an entire doctrinal process, rooted first in the universal romantic speculation on the problem of races, and then activated by the characteristics and perspectives of the offensive unleashed from the North" (Ardao, 1980, p. 83). Put simply, Torres Caicedo was the figure who ultimately gave concrete form to the name *América Latina*, as he brought together the various threads of parallel developments unfolding in South America, Europe, and the United States. As an intellectual and political journalist in Colombia, he was well-acquainted with Bolívar's vision of Hispanic-American unity; residing in France, he was exposed to European Latinist discourse; and, through his work in international journalism, he closely followed and critiqued U.S. imperialist expansion in Spanish-speaking America. He was thus placed in the perfect position to take the step that others, such as Chevalier, could not.

The formulation of the term represented the culmination of a long process, led by the Hispanic American elite, to articulate a unifying terminology—one that did not entirely renounce Europe, seen as a symbol of civilization, but also sought to move beyond the colonial legacy evoked by the demonym *española*. Another great advantage of the term *latina* is that, while preserving symbolic ties to Europe, it also held the potential to be expanded, eventually encompassing Portuguese-speaking Brazil and French-speaking nations such as Haiti.

The consolidation of the name Latin America was not an immediate development. Alternative designations such as *Spanish America* and *South America* remained in use for several years. However, starting in 1856, Torres Caicedo and others increasingly treated these terms as

interchangeable, contributing to the gradual establishment of *Latin America* as a widely accepted alternative by the end of the 1850s (Ardao, 1980, p.84).

Ardao ultimately concludes that, although global Latinism originated in France, the notion of *Latin America* as it is understood today is fundamentally Hispanic-American and anti-imperialist—a meaning traceable to Torres Caicedo himself. He denounced both U.S. and French imperialism and was not deterred by France's attempt to hijack the new expression. On the contrary, he continued to adopt it over the course of the 1860s, revising earlier works to incorporate the new term. (pp. 88-90).

Throughout the subsequent decades of the 19th century and into the early 20th century, many Latin American intellectuals—among them Carlos Calvo, Juan Montalvo, Eugenio María de Hostos, Cecilio Acosta, José Martí, and José Enrique Rodó—contributed to the affirmation and consolidation of the expression *Latin America*, gradually establishing it as a widely accepted reference (Ardao, 1980, pp. 90-94). José María Torres Caicedo passed away in 1889, having been broadly acknowledged during his lifetime as a central figure in the dissemination and legitimization of the name *América Latina*—an intellectual legacy of which he was deeply proud.

## 4. Rojas Mix and the Argument in Favor of Bilbao

### 4.1 The History of America Through Its Names

The objective of Rojas Mix's *Los cien nombres de América* (1991) differs significantly from Ardao's, and understanding this distinction is key to grasping his conclusions. First, as the title suggests, the Chilean historian does not distinguish between ideas and names, treating adjectivization and substantivation as a single phenomenon. Second, while Phelan traced European influence and Ardao highlighted Latin American agency in the creation of the term *Latin America*, Rojas Mix undertook a broader task: to (re)construct American history through its various names. Rather than focusing on *Latin America* specifically, his study explores how the historical evolution of names given to the American continent sheds light on its culture and identity[12]. This naming history underscores Rojas Mix's central point: that American, and especially Latin American, identities are plural. Terms such as Indoamerica, Afroamerica, and Iberoamerica are not competitors but complementary concepts that reflect and enrich Latin America's cultural hybridity.

[12] In this sense, Rojas Mix follows somehow an Americanist perspective, much like Bilbao.

**4.2 Francisco Bilbao: A renegade thinker?**

There is no divergence between Rojas Mix and Ardao concerning the Latin American participation in the origin of the term *América Latina*. There is also consensus regarding the location and historical context of its emergence: France during the rule of Napoleon III. However, the Chilean differs from the Uruguayan on the matter of the term's authorship. According to Rojas Mix, the true originator of the expression was the Chilean intellectual **Francisco Bilbao** (1823–1865), who would have used the new expression three months before Torres Caicedo, at a conference in Paris on June 24, 1856 (Rojas Mix, 1991, p. 344).

Rojas Mix claims that Ardao presumably does not attribute the creation of the term to Bilbao because the Chilean later disavowed the new denomination following the French intervention in Mexico, whereas Torres Caicedo continued to uphold it until the end of his life. Beyond that, he insinuates that Torres Caicedo persists in using the terminology because the journalist was closer to the French and, consequently, less inclined to reject French imperialism (Rojas Mix, 1991, p. 344). In contrast to the allegedly French-friendly Torres Caicedo, Rojas Mix portrays Bilbao as a more politically dissident and nonconformist figure—one who was marginalized both during his lifetime and posthumously for these very iconoclast traits (Rojas Mix, 1991, p. 345).

In addition to commending Bilbao, Rojas Mix suggests that Torres Caicedo was not only present at the Paris conference on June 24—where Bilbao employed the name *América Latina*—but that he also plagiarized the expression from his Chilean counterpart. Rojas Mix argues that the circle of Hispanic American intellectuals in Paris at the time was relatively small, rendering it highly improbable that Torres Caicedo had not attended the event in person or, at the very least, had not heard of it.

Besides the chronological argument, Rojas Mix's main point in defending his compatriot Bilbao is political and ideological. According to him, Bilbao "not only (…) was the first to use" the term, but indeed "he gave it its current meaning, very distant from the conceptions of Latinity of that time" (Rojas Mix, 1991, p. 346). He continues:

> Bilbao not only preceded other thinkers in using the expression but also foreshadowed the meaning it would later acquire in the language of the Latin American left. He coined the concept within the framework of anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist thought and a project for a socialist society (p. 349).

Rojas Mix attributes later Bilbao's skepticism toward Latinism to France's invasion of Mexico, which exposed the contradiction between civilizing rhetoric and imperial aggression. In works like *La América em peligro* (1862) and *El evangelio americano* (1864), he denounces the "civilizing missions" of powers like the U.S. and France, warning that America risked losing its sovereignty and identity if it failed to resist imperialism. Reversing the colonialist logic of associating America with barbarism and Europe with civilization, Bilbao states that it would be necessary to "save American civilization" from the "barbaric invasion of Europe" (Rojas Mix, 1991, p. 350).

Bilbao appears, to some extent, to perceive greater potential for mutual understanding and cooperation with the United States than with Europe, particularly given that his suspicion of Pan-Latinism became a central focus of his critique of imperialism. His mistrust of global *Latinidad* constitutes the main dividing line between him and Torres Caicedo, shaping the debate surrounding the continent's name authorship. In the following section, we will examine the points of divergence between Ardao and Rojas Mix, addressing each issue in turn.

## 5. Discussion

Let us break down Rojas Mix's critique of Ardao into four components: The pioneering adoption of the designation *América Latina*; Bilbao's distrust of Latinist terms; The contributions of Torres Caicedo to the consolidation of the noun *América Latina*; and the contemporary meaning of the name Latin America.

### 5.1 The pioneering adoption of the designation *América Latina*.

Rojas Mix is correct when he states that Bilbao used the expression *América latina* at a Parisian conference in June 1856. However, he is not accurate in his criticism of Ardao for overlooking Bilbao's significance. Ardao not only mentions Bilbao's contribution to the new terminology but also explains why he does not consider the Chilean as its creator: Bilbao would still be speaking in strictly adjectival terms (Ardao, 1980, p. 82). In addition, Ardao argues that Bilbao used the expression *América latina* only once at the Paris conference of June 1856 and preferred another terminology: *América del Sur*, which appears more than twenty times in the transcription of that speech (Bilbao, 2007b, pp. 363-374). He stated:

> But America lives; **Latin, Saxon, and Indigenous America** protests and takes upon itself the responsibility of representing the cause of humanity, of renewing the faith of the heart, and ultimately of producing not theatrical repetitions of the Middle Ages, with the servile hierarchy of nobility, but rather the perpetual action of the citizen and the creation of living justice in the fields of the Republic. (Bilbao, 2007b, p. 366).

The context of this text points to an **Americanist** rather than a Latin Americanist sentiment. Bilbao is not coining a new term here, but rather attributing different adjectives to a single entity: America (in the singular). His use of terms like *Latin*, *Saxon*, and *Indigenous* highlights the continent's racial and linguistic diversity, not separate Americas. In his June 1856 address, he does not oppose a *Saxon* America to a *Latin* one, but presents a unified continent marked by plural identities. Although recent studies (García San Martín, 2013) indicate that Bilbao employed the adjectives *sajona* and *latina* since 1851, when using nouns, he preferred geographical terms—*South America* and *North America*—emphasizing regional distinctions over racial or linguistic ones.

One could argue that Torres Caicedo also began using the new name as an adjective and that it is difficult to distinguish the point at which a term ceases to be a qualifier and becomes a noun. In the end, how can we determine whether this shift first occurred with Torres Caicedo? Such a transformation does not occur overnight, but rather through a gradual process that involves advances and setbacks. The true inventor of the name of *Nuestra América* cannot be solely the one who used it for the first time[13], but rather **the one who not only contributed to the process of metamorphosis that culminated in the new name but also helped to consolidate it as a preferred name over its competitors**. Therefore, it is necessary to compare the actions of Torres Caicedo and Bilbao after 1856 to determine who was the great protagonist of this transformation. From this point of view, Torres Caicedo has an even greater advantage over Bilbao.

[13] This point is significant, as even the claim that Bilbao was the first to use the name is not universally accepted. Gobat (2013, p. 1361) asserts that the French journalist Félix Belly used the designation in February 1856, a week before Bilbao. It is likely that no single individual among them was, in fact, the first to have used the name, and that the expression had already appeared on multiple occasions prior, without any surviving historical record. Torres Caicedo himself claimed to have used the expression since 1851 — a possibility that can neither be proved nor dismissed.

**5.2 Bilbao's lack of enthusiasm for Latinist vocabulary.**

Rojas Mix claims that Bilbao's reluctance toward Latinist terminology after the French intervention in Mexico is proof that Bilbao favored neologisms that were anti-imperialist in essence, and that he was “forced” to reject Latinism when he saw France co-opting it to justify its imperialist aggression (Rojas Mix, 1991, pp. 350-352).

As commendable as Bilbao’s anti-imperialist impetus might be, the issue at hand is not who was the more heroic or morally superior intellectual—as Rojas Mix at times seems to suggest—but rather to determine who coined the label *Latin America*. Criticisms regarding Torres Caicedo’s alleged affiliation with the elitist circles of Paris, as well as Bilbao’s purported marginalization, are not pertinent to the matter under consideration. Also, the allegation that Torres Caicedo deliberately plagiarized Bilbao is almost impossible to substantiate. Even if the Colombian were indeed inspired by his Chilean counterpart, the authorship of the new designation would still belong to the person who promoted its usage and worked for its substantivation. It appears highly implausible to maintain that the originator of the noun *América Latina* would be someone who scarcely employed it, consistently gave priority to geographical denominations, and vocally denounced Latinism as an imperialist tool.

Walter Mignolo interprets Bilbao’s position as the foundation of a critical stance that rejects *Latinidad* as an imperialist political project rather than an expression of identity consciousness (Mignolo, 2005, pp. 67–72). However, this interpretation appears less convincing when one considers Bilbao’s evident admiration for the United States. Rojas Mix and Mignolo fail to discuss the consequences of Bilbao’s inclination to emphasize, beyond the opposition between South America and North America, **a broader opposition between “European Civilization” and “American Civilization”** (Bilbao, 1864, pp. 142-151). Although he made continuous and recurring criticisms of the US expansionist policy, Bilbao was receptive to the idea of a North-South American alliance to contain Europe, as he stated in 1863: “The alliance with the United States, purified of slavery, will grant us the supremacy of civilization. Today, civilization is synonymous with America and Republic”. (Bilbao, 2007a, p. 590).

He also tended to see the *sajones* as a model:

> (…) the heroic Puritans, unable to find a land where they could worship God freely, emigrate to North America and establish, for the first time in history, the free association of free men. This was the seed of the most powerful nation in all known history: the *United States of North America*. (Bilbao, 1864, p.127)

Although Bilbao often employs the term *América del Sur*, he also consistently uses the singular noun *América*, maintaining a deliberate ambiguity as to whether *América del Norte* is included. His works reveal an implicit South Americanist perspective that coexists with, and at times overlaps, a broader Americanist sentiment. His renewed "anti-Europeanism" after 1862 reinforced the (South) Americanist views he had already expressed. In the 1856 conference mentioned earlier, he included Saxon-American peoples alongside Latin and Indigenous Americans as potential innovators, in contrast to the "old Europe," which he compared to a mausoleum. (Bilbao, 2007b, p. 366). He reveals a latent Latin American (which he prefers to designate as South American) sentiment, a feeling inherited from Bolívar and Lamennais but tending more toward Americanism than Latin Americanism, insofar as he identifies Europe—rather than the United States—as the principal threat that would trigger the unity of (South) Americans.

García San Martin believes that Bilbao attributed a unique and radically progressive meaning to the term *Latin America*, distinguishing it from French and Spanish usages (García San Martín, 2013). This singularity, however, is largely due to his choice to embrace the "revolutionary" liberalism of the United States and reject European reactionary despotism. His radical liberalism, ironically, set him apart from Latin America, while Torres Caicedo's moderate and Francophile position brought him closer to it.

**5.3 The contributions of Torres Caicedo to the consolidation of the noun *América Latina*.**

Ardao argues that Torres Caicedo is the end point of the three-phase process (the same one that led to the creation of the term *America*) that includes the initial phase in which there is no idea or name for Latin America; a second phase in which there is an idea but no name; and the third phase in which the name emerges. We could think of a **fourth phase** when the name is consolidated and subdues competing denominations. A name fulfills its social function when it is recognizable—when it is capable of evoking the thing spoken to the interlocutor. In this sense, the popularization of a new name is the decisive phase, when a noun tests its survival. Hereof, José Maria Torres Caicedo was the great promoter of the new noun, even when Latinist vocabulary suffered a setback due to the French and Spanish interventions in the Americas in the 1860s (Ardao, 1980, pp. 107-110). Despite his criticism of Europe's aggression, Torres Caicedo continued throughout the 1860s to advocate not only for the name *América Latina* but also for the **economic integration** of the continent. Two works from this period are particularly noteworthy.

In *La multipatria latinoamericana* (1864), he recommends the formation of a confederation of Latin American states, arguing that, given their shared histories, cultural ties, and common political and economic interests, a centralized federal government would be unnecessary. Instead, he envisions a structure that would preserve local autonomy while promoting liberal principles such as universal citizenship and education, free trade, freedom of conscience and religion (Torres Caicedo, 2012). In *Unión latinoamericana* (1865), Torres Caicedo once again draws on the legacy of Bolívar to advocate for the establishment of an inter-American league grounded in the shared heritage of Latin American peoples, which would serve as a means of resisting U.S. expansionism and safeguarding the region's sovereignty and cultural identity. He urges the Latin American peoples to unite against the Monroe Doctrine:

> Moreover, what do Latin American nations have to do with the opinions of the statesmen of Anglo-Saxon America? Have those republics perhaps granted full powers to the North American Union to act on their behalf, or are those states under the tutelage of the great nation of the North? We do not want, for Latin America, interference in its affairs by either North America or Europe (...) (Torres Caicedo, 2023, p. 60).

Torres Caicedo is responsible for synthesizing Bolívar's earlier Hispanic-American unionism with the emerging Latin Americanism influenced by European Romanticism (Ardao, 1980, p. 99). As soon as he adopted the new term, he began to promote the *Unión Latinoamericana*, and went beyond intellectual work alone: he defended his ideas in Congresses and meetings. In 1878, at the Universal Exhibition held in the French capital, Torres Caicedo played such a prominent role that he received homage from the Latin American delegates for representing the Latin American republics, defending their union, and providing good publicity for the continent in Europe (Ardao, 1980, pp. 114-115).

In 1879, as Minister Plenipotentiary of El Salvador in France, he founded the ***Sociedad de la Unión Latinoamericana***, "intended to promote in practical terms the unionist conceptions set out in his previous writings" (Ardao, 1980, p.112). This organization would have branches opened in other European capitals, such as Rome, in 1880. Next year, Argentina would see the founding of the "Sociedad Unión Latino Americana de las Repúblicas del Plata" (Ardao, 1980, pp. 122-125). In 1886, shortly before his death, Torres Caicedo stated: "For me, a Colombian, who loves my

noble homeland with enthusiasm, there is a greater homeland: '*la América latina'*." (Ardao, 1980, p. 127).

The fact that Torres Caicedo revised his earlier works and replaced the term *América Española* with *América Latina* is interpreted by Rojas Mix as an act of intellectual dishonesty (Rojas Mix, 1991, p. 345). I propose a different reading. This revision of terminology (which is quite common among scholars) reflects not only the Colombian author's intellectual maturity in identifying a more appropriate designation but also serves as evidence of his active role in shaping and promoting the new term over the years. In 1875, almost twenty years after the publication of *Las dos Américas*, he already felt comfortable classifying the term as scientific: "There is Anglo-Saxon, Danish, Dutch, etc. America; **there is Spanish, French, and Portuguese America; and what scientific name can be applied to this group other than Latin America?**" (Ardao, 1980, p. 94).

What else can we call *Latin America*, then, if not an established and mature noun?

**5.4 The contemporary meaning of the name *Latin America*.**

Rojas Mix argued convincingly that *Latin America*—and the gentilic *Latinoamericano*—carries anti-imperialist meaning. Initially tied to anti-European sentiment, the term was later redirected against U.S. dominance—a shift Torres Caicedo foresaw with remarkable clarity. Unlike Bilbao, **he realized that, despite Europe's momentary threat, the United States was the real challenge** (Ardao, 1980, p. 110; Torres Caicedo, 2023, pp. 57-62). In adittion, he likely saw the term's potential to unite not only Spanish-speaking countries but also French-speaking ones—and even distant and endogenous Brazil[14]. While Bilbao's Americanist approach also had the potential to include non-Hispanic nations, it not only allowed for the possibility of reconciliation with the United States—an idea history has shown to be an illusion—but also contradicted the foundational principle that defines the Latin continent: the exclusion of the *sajones*. The notion of a Latin American identity does not stem solely from a general rejection of imperialism, as Rojas Mix claims (Rojas Mix, 1991, p. 354), but also from a more specific resistance to the *gringos del Norte*. Torres Caicedo acknowledged that you either choose to be a Latin Americanist or an Americanist, you could not be both. The fact that Washington has always promoted the latter over the former is no coincidence[15].

[14] On Brazil's isolation within the continent and Brazilian perspectives on Latin America, see: (Farret & Pinto, 2011; Prado, 2001; Quental, 2023; Ribeiro, 2012; Souza, 2011; Vieira-Souza & Matos, 2021.)

[15] On this topic see Ardao (2018).

The concept of Latin America eventually entered the English-speaking world, including the United States, where it was adopted within the same logic of opposition between two distinct Americas. Political scientist Feres Jr. argues that the term functioned as an "asymmetrical counter-concept" to the U.S.'s idealized self-image (Feres, Jr, 2010, p. 21). This appropriation reinforced a positive (North) American identity by attributing negative traits to Latin Americans, such as irrationality and indolence, creating a divide between "us" (Americans) and "them" (Latin Americans)[16]. This development further justifies Torres Caicedo's stance: the United States came to occupy the place of the Other in shaping Latin American identity, replacing Europe as the imperial force and source of common solidarity.

After its adoption in the U.S., the cleavage between Latin Americans and (North) Americans deepened and remains significant. The Mexico–U.S. border is a concrete symbol of this separation, extending beyond the physical to the symbolic. In this light, Bilbao's hope for a Latin American–U.S. alliance to counter Europe seems misplaced. The twentieth century brought not estrangement but a growing compromise in the Global North, effectively marginalizing Latin America. As Chevalier foresaw, Europe came to see the U.S. as a continuation of Western civilization, leaving Latin America in a peripheral position.

## 6. Conclusions

The assertion that the name *Latin America* was a French creation appears inaccurate. Although Pan-Latinism had an undeniable influence on Hispanic-American intellectuals living in France, the claim to a common identity among Spanish-speaking American elites was already a long-standing issue for decades. Pan-Latinism merely gave new impetus to this pre-existing feeling. This explains why the term *Latin America* became a noun, while the expression *Latin Europe*, rarely used, never left the field of pure adjectivation.

In this sense, Ardao demonstrates that the name *Latin America* is the outcome of a long historical process unfolding on both sides of the Atlantic. In the New World, it is rooted in the Hispanic-American search for identity, while in the Old World, it is linked to Romantic conceptions of race and its role in history. The hybrid nature of the term that designates *Nuestra América* (partly European, partly autochthonous) underscores the continent's *mestizo/mestiço* composition—one

[16] For a perspective on the term "Latino" within the United States from the viewpoint of immigrants, see: Gutiérrez (2016).

of Latin America's most defining features. By overlooking Latin American involvement in this process, the historical agency of *latinos* and their capacity for self-reinvention in relation to European colonialism is discredited.

Arturo Ardao seems to be right when he states that the father of the term *América Latina* is the Colombian José Maria Torres Caicedo, not the Chilean Francisco Bilbao. There are three reasons for this. The **first** is that Bilbao used the term "*Latina*" as an adjective. Being an Americanist, the Chilean never prioritized Latinist or even Hispanist terminology, preferring to use geographical nouns to classify the two Americas. His favorite term was *América del Sur*, used in opposition to *América del Norte*. This tendency intensified after the French intervention in Mexico and the Spanish recolonization of Santo Domingo.

The **second reason** was Torres Caicedo's persistence in using the term *Latin America* even amid opposition, particularly due to its opportunistic appropriation by the French. Not only through his writings but also by organizing Latin American meetings and associations, the Colombian author consistently promoted Latin Americanism. His tenacity was both remarkable and crucial, as he challenged the Europeans' use of the noun, asserting a leading role for Latin Americans in shaping and applying the meanings of the new designation.

The **final reason** is that Torres Caicedo actively promoted the noun *América Latina* in opposition to the United States (*América Sajona*). Although Rojas Mix credits Bilbao with defining the modern notion of Latin America, the Chilean was more focused on how the New World should resist European intellectual domination, seeing the United States more as a model than as an adversary. He never proposed any policy or worked toward the construction of a common identity to oppose the *sajones*.

Unfortunately, the Chilean author died young in early 1865 and never witnessed the catastrophic outcome of the French venture in Mexico. We do not know what Bilbao's attitude towards the term *Latin America* would have been if he had not passed away so early. Perhaps he had embraced the Latinist vocabulary after the French defeat and the growing US imperialist threat[17]. We will never know, but it is undeniable that he also contributed to the formation of Latin American identity. Among the various elements of his legacy, one stands out as central to Latin Americanism: Bilbao's deep skepticism toward Europe's civilizing discourse, which led him to advocate for

[17] This was the case of Juan Manuel Carrasco who, like Bilbao, initially praised the United States but later changed his position (Gobat, 2013, p. 1353).

**intellectual emancipation** for South Americans. In this regard, he is a precursor of the post-colonial thought that would emerge in the twentieth century (Martínez Peria, 2020).

José Maria Torres Caicedo, in turn, holds the title of baptizer of Latin America. His intention—ultimately confirmed by historical developments—was to safeguard the term and prevent its complete appropriation by the Europeans. Paradoxically, it could be argued that Torres Caicedo was a Francophile who viewed France as a model to be emulated and was not free from the influence of European colonial thought (something Bilbao was worried about[18]). I could hardly disagree. But what, then, should be the most effective strategy for resisting French colonialism?

Some scholars, such as Mignolo, suggest that what is inspired or influenced by colonialism is permanently tainted, which could lead to the conclusion that "one way to decolonize Latin America might indeed be to erase the term from the Global Map" (Gobat, 2013, p. 1375). This approach, however, seems not only impractical but also rooted in some kind of mixophobia — as if it were possible, or even desirable, to subtract or eradicate the European traces embedded in Latin American cultures. Ultimately, it amounts to a rejection of *mestizaje/mestiçagem,* which is seen as an inescapable homogeneity project by the elites to erase alternative epistemologies (Mignolo, 2005, pp. 135–136). I acknowledge that this concept is not without its own pitfalls—including its historical association with elitist ideals such as the *racial democracy* myth. Yet this tendency to reject any Western trace also risks a subtle return to the pursuit of an idealized pre-colonial essentialism, a form of identity-based puritanism. It is important to recognize that oppressive or authoritarian practices can also emerge from non-Western traditions, and combating them is just as crucial as opposing Eurocentrism. Moreover, resistance does not always require total rejection; it can take the form of alternative strategies and more nuanced forms of engagement. Spanish and Portuguese languages, for example, were imposed through colonialism, yet Latin Americans—from different social classes and racial backgrounds, and not solely from the European-descended elite, as Mignolo (2005, pp. 21-22) would have us believe—have since reappropriated them as vehicles for their own literary, artistic, and scientific expression. What can we say about Social Sciences, then? Though they originated as European tools of epistemological domination, they have since undergone profound transformations and can now serve as decolonial tools. Why, then, should a similar appropriation not be possible with the notion of "Latinism"?

[18] However, Bilbao himself was influenced by racist ideas, describing Black and Indigenous people as primitive (Gobat, 2013, p. 1352).

Like Torres Caicedo, I believe that, at times, it is more effective to reappropriate and reframe terminologies than to relinquish them entirely to adversarial discourse. This does not mean that alternative names such as *Abya Yala* (Mignolo, 2005, p. 122) or *Mestizo America* (Gobat, p. 1374) should be opposed or dismissed. Ardao sensibly argues that different terms can be used in different contexts (Ardao, 1980, pp. 8-9) without one undermining the other[19].

Ultimately, Torres Caicedo's persistence (along with that of others who followed) proved effective: Today, when one speaks of the "Latin/Latino" world or culture—except among enthusiasts or scholars of Greco-Roman classicism—few associate it with Italy or even with Europe. Latin language is dead, Latin America is alive. *Latinidad/Latinidade* has become almost synonymous with Latin America, evoking notions of a unique culture distinct from the Old World. In this sense, it was Latin Americans who appropriated a European term and "stole" it for their own purposes. If Europe once sought to "Latinize" America as a means of recolonization, America redefined *Latinidad/Latinidade* on its own terms, positioning itself as the agent of its own history.

[19] Mignolo comes close to a similar conclusion regarding the legitimacy of multiple denominations by accepting the coexistence of *Abya Yala* and *America* (2005, p. 166). However, he remains reluctant to fully embrace *Latin America* as a designation that includes non-European descendants (p. 22).

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