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From Rivalry to Mutual Trust: The Othering Process between Bolivia and Chile

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From Rivalry to Mutual Trust: The Othering Process between Bolivia and Chile

Abstract

Bolivia and Chile live in a culture of rivalry as a consequence of the Nitrate War (1879-1883). In each country's case, the construction of the other as a threat, a rival and/or inferior has shaped the discursive articulation of the bilateral relationship. Whereas the culture of rivalry is more evident in Bolivia because of its aspiration to alter the border, Chile's status-quo position, which stresses that there are no pending issues with Bolivia, as well as its construction of itself as superior, also represents rivalrous behavior. The perception of Chile as a threat and rival became especially evident in Bolivia during these two countries' bilateral negotiations to export gas to and through Chile (gas crisis from 2001-05). However, since Evo Morales and Michelle Bachelet took office in Bolivia (2006-present) and in Chile (2006-10), respectively, they have sought to change this culture of rivalry to one of friendship by constructing discursive articulations of self and other based on the principle of building mutual trust. Such a change in the form of othering is only possible to understand within the context of a crisis of meanings. The new approach of othering the counterpart as a friend has filled the void of meaning left by the crisis of discursive articulations of othering the counterpart as a rival, a threat and/or inferior.

Keywords: discourse, othering, identity, crisis, change, Bolivia, Chile

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Zusammenfassung

Von Rivalität zu beiderseitigem Vertrauen: Der Abgrenzungsprozess zwischen Bolivien und Chile

Bolivien und Chile leben – als Konsequenz des Salpeter-Krieges (1879-1883) – in einer „Kultur der Rivalität“. Seit diesem Krieg wechseln sich in den bilateralen Beziehungen dieser beiden Länder Episoden der Anspannung mit Momenten relativer Beruhigung ab. Die Darstellung des jeweils Anderen als eine Bedrohung, als Rivale und die Einstufung als minderwertig hat die diskursive Umsetzung der bilateralen Beziehungen geformt. Während in Bolivien die „Kultur der Rivalität“ wegen der angestrebten Grenzänderung stärker in den Vordergrund rückt, nimmt Chile gegenwärtig eine Position ein, wonach es keine offenen Themen mit Bolivien gäbe. Jedoch zeugt die Betonung der chilenischen Seite als überlegene Kraft gegenüber Bolivien von offener Rivalität. Die Wahrnehmung Chiles als Bedrohung und als Rivale wurde in Bolivien während der Gas-Krise zwischen 2001 und 2005 offensichtlich. Seit dem Regierungsantritt von Evo Morales in Bolivien (2006-) und Michelle Bachelet in Chile (2006-2010) betonen beide, dass sie diese „Kultur der Rivalität“ beenden wollen und stattdessen eine diskursive Verständigung – basierend auf den Prinzipien der Freundschaft und des gegenseitigen Vertrauens – zwischen beiden Ländern anstreben.

From Rivalry to Mutual Trust: The Othering Process between Bolivia and Chile

Leslie Wehner

Article Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Othering and Change
- 3 The Legacy of the Past
- 4 The Crisis of Othering
- 5 A New Othering Process
- 6 Conclusion

1 Introduction

Bolivia and Chile have constructed a mutual “culture of rivalry” rather than one of friendship. A culture of rivalry can be conceived, in ideal terms, as a state of being between a “culture of hostility” and “one of friendship.”¹ Bolivia and Chile are part of a *zone of negative peace* (Kacowicz 1998) or a *zone of violent peace* (Mares 2001). These two phrases express the fact that unsolved border issues still exist but that armed conflicts are unlikely. In addition, they suggest that rivalrous role relations shape the course of interstate relationships in South America in general (Thies 2008), and between Bolivia and Chile in particular. Yet Bolivia and Chile have socially constructed a culture of rivalry by reassessing their common history, according to discursive articulations of self and other.

The origin of this culture of rivalry between Bolivia and Chile was the Nitrate War (1879-83), as a result of which the former lost access to the sea. The Nitrate War, known in Spanish as *La Guerra del Pacífico*, was triggered by strategic and economic issues. The strate-

¹ These three cultures are taken from Alexander Wendt’s three cultures of anarchy (1999).

gic issue was the secret defensive pact signed by Peru and Bolivia, which was seen as a threat by Chile. The economic issue was the dispute over the control of the nitrate industry in the Antofagasta-Atacama territory. This territory is now part of Chile, but at that time belonged to Bolivia. The redefinition of the borders after the conflict favored Chile, the winning party (Villalobos 1991: 569-571; Mesa 2008: 346-349).

Ever since the definitive demarcation of the borders between Bolivia and Chile was confirmed in 1904—and since Bolivia's landlocked condition was reaffirmed in a bilateral treaty between Chile and Peru in 1929—regaining access to the sea has been a key issue in Bolivia's foreign policy. The relationship between Bolivia and Chile has included several episodes in which the former has brought up the issue of recovering an outlet to the sea in bilateral and multilateral forums. In fact, Bolivia's maritime aspiration still plays a strong role in determining the way both countries construct their images of the other. Despite the fact that these two countries have not had a military incident since 1884, they still conceive of each other according to a pattern of rivalry.

This rivalry is part of a path-dependent "othering" process in which distrust is key in creating the image of the other country and in giving meaning to its actions and inactions. Distrust is also key in explaining the difficulties in sustaining constructive dialogue to move the bilateral relationship forward. In fact, Chile and Bolivia have not had official diplomatic relations since 1978, a fact symptomatic of the distrust these two countries have had of the interests and actions of the other.

The difficult relationship between Bolivia and Chile reached a new point of tension in 2001, when they negotiated the export of Bolivian gas to and through Chilean territory. Bolivian civil society groups saw this as an act of treason on the part of their leaders. In fact, the fall of Bolivian president Sánchez de Lozada (2002-2003) can be partly explained by these negotiations, since they triggered the mobilization of civil society groups against the government. These popular mobilizations caused 60 deaths (Flemes and Radseck 2009: 9). The subsequent Bolivian government held a referendum on the issue of exporting gas through Chile, in which the population voted against such exports. President Carlos Mesa (October 2003-June 2005) then pursued a tactic of offering gas to Chile only if sovereign access to the sea was guaranteed (*gas por mar*). Yet Mesa was not able to complete his term because of the deep socioeconomic splits within Bolivia and the lack of support from Congress for his administration.

Once Evo Morales (2006-present) became president, he sought to establish an integrative dialogue with his Chilean counterpart, Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010), with the aim of ameliorating the difficult relationship between the two countries. In this new dialogue, the lack of mutual trust has been recognized with statements regarding the need for each country to gain confidence in the other. This is the main aspect of a bilateral agenda of 13 points

established by Morales and Bachelet to improve the relationship between the two countries.² Mutual trust is also seen as *sine qua non* for tackling other issues such as Bolivia's access to the sea. This change raises the following questions: If Chile's and Bolivia's national identities have long been based, at least partly, on mutual constructions of the other as a rival and untrustworthy, then *how has it happened that, under Michelle Bachelet and Evo Morales, they have started to talk about developing mutual trust? What steps have both countries taken to build such trust?*

The implementation of a new discourse accompanied by symbolic and material gestures are the basis for how Chile and Bolivia are each trying to create a new image of the other. I argue that the policy of building mutual trust is a change in the relationship of these countries resulting from their recognition of the need to establish a constructive dialogue that strengthens bilateral cooperation and changes the culture of rivalry to one of friendship. However, the initial transformation of the interstate relationship is being carried out using a new form of othering—from rivalry to friendship. The change in the bilateral relationship can only be understood within the context of a crisis of official discourses used for internal and external political purposes. The attempts of leaders³ in both countries to emphasize the need to build mutual trust does not necessarily mean the definitive displacement of the prior references to the other as a threat (Bolivia towards Chile), a rival (both countries), or inferior (Chile towards Bolivia), as these depictions play a strong role in the national identities of both nations. On the contrary, the reversion to previous ways of othering is always a possibility, as the attempts to create a new way of perceiving and depicting the counterpart compete with, and challenge, previous official discourses.

This article proceeds as follows: First, I introduce the analytical framework. This framework relies on the literature regarding otherness as well as on the concept of crises in order to understand the change from one form of othering to another. Second, in order to provide historical context, I present the key events of the relationship rather than the complete history of the border problems between the two countries. Third, I investigate how the discourse of Chile as a rival came into crisis in Bolivia, and how Chile's othering of Bolivia as inferior, and its discourse of economic success and internationalization, also experienced a crisis vis-à-vis the rest of the Latin American countries, thereby facilitating a more constructive dialogue with Bolivia. Fourth, I analyze the emergence of a new form of othering (friends), and I discuss how presidents Evo Morales and Michelle Bachelet are creating measures of mutual trust. In conclusion, I assess the challenges facing this policy of building mutual trust.

² The 13 points of the bilateral agenda are as follows: the development of mutual trust; border integration; free transit; physical integration; economic cooperation; the maritime-access issue; the Silala River issue and water resources; poverty alleviation; security and defense; cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking; education, science, and technology; culture; and others such as the energy issue.

³ On the role of leadership in the emergence of a hegemonic discourse, see Nabers 2010.

2 Othering and Change

Patterns of enmity and amity between states are usually articulated in relation to geographic proximity (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 46). The formation of a security cluster and its actors' identities are co-constituted according to images, symbols and narratives of self and other. The nature of such states' relationships is the result of a common historical experience and the permanent need to reproduce and interpret such events in order to maintain the present construction of reality. Thus, the relationship between Chile and Bolivia cannot be analyzed without reference to the past and its legacy. This legacy has produced mental maps on both sides that are the consequence of a constant process of "othering" the counterpart.

Following the forms of otherness (Diez 2005; Hansen 2006; Neumann 1999), we can distinguish some ways in which other states are depicted in security relationships; these are key to understanding extant interstate cultures of rivalry.⁴ First, representations of *the other as a threat* portray the other state as dangerous, a rival, untrustworthy and in pursuit of its national interests in a zero-sum way. Past experiences, such as wars, and the reinterpretations of these events that seek to conceive of the other as dangerous, untrustworthy and expansionist, are likely to enhance a culture of rivalry between states. This view of the other as a threat is how Bolivians often see Chile as a consequence of both the Nitrate War and Bolivia's landlocked condition (Mesa 2008).

Second, states may represent *the other as inferior* in order to enhance the perception of their own superiority, not only regarding security issues but also with respect to culture: that is, what makes a state and its community different and identifiable vis-à-vis other states and their respective societies. According to Lene Hansen (2006), this is perhaps the most common form of othering carried out by communities in order to enhance the self and to differentiate it from the other. This form of othering may apply to the way Chile has constructed its image of Bolivia: Chile has discursively used its victory in the Nitrate War to shape and enhance the meaning of being Chilean (see Cuevas 2008). Chile's national identity of superiority vis-à-vis Bolivia has also been heightened by Chile's supposed economic success in the context of economic globalization and Bolivia's lesser economic performance. In my view, these two forms of othering—the other as a threat and the other as an inferior—are likely to enhance a culture of rivalry.

A third possibility is to represent the other as different. According to Diez (2005: 628-629), the other as different does not imply constructing the other as a threat, superior, or inferior—it is simply a process of differentiation, which, however, still imposes identity on others. This way of othering and the unfolding of discursive practices around this notion are preferable to the other two as it reduces the chances of harmful practices towards the other (Diez 2005: 629).

⁴ For a complete discussion of otherness, see Hansen 2006, chapter 3. Forms of otherness additional to those presented in this article are the self as inferior and the other as superior. Another form of otherness is the construction of a temporal new self based on one's own past. See also Neumann 1996; Todorov 1992; and Wæver 1996.

However, all other forms of otherness are also discursive articulations of differentiation. Thus, I use the concept of the *other as friend* instead of the *other as different*. I shall also add that this mode of othering may facilitate the establishment of enduring cooperation not through the homogenization of the self and the other, but through the maintenance of differences, the acknowledgment of them, and the perception that they offer the possibility of developing a sense of cooperative need vis-à-vis the other. When Bolivian and Chilean leaders began to talk about building mutual trust in 2006, they may have been starting to focus on othering the counterpart as a friend. National identity is also about what the future of a nation is, or what the nation wants to make of that future (Larrain 2005). Thus, the future does not just represent continuity; it may also entail changes in the construction of the other as a rival or a friend.

The different forms of othering are helpful in analyzing how a culture of rivalry (or friendship) is socially constructed. Whereas the forms of otherness are useful to understand an interstate relationship—be this hostile, rivalrous or friendly—these forms cannot predict the potential changes from one form of othering to another. Thus, it is necessary to include the notion of crisis as a driver of change, even if the replacement of a socially accepted discourse with a new ideational orthodoxy is not complete (see Legro 2000: 424).

The displacement of previous ways of othering is always an unfinished project. The old and the new discourses compete to become the official orthodoxy, which reflects not only the present but also the future relationship between two states. The new interpretation of a social reality often needs to include aspects of the discourse that is being displaced, and with which the new discourse is competing. Therefore, transformation caused by a crisis in the interpretation of social realities keeps certain notions of the previous, “displaced” discourse. Here, past, present and future converge in the failure and collapse of the official interpretation of the other. This convergence also indicates that it is partly the past that made the establishment of a new way of constructing images, symbols and narratives of the self and the other in interstate relationships possible.

A crisis of meanings is a manifestation of the failure of dominant discursive orthodoxies (Legro 2000). Crises regarding the construction and reproduction of a pattern of self and other take place when an othering discourse can no longer explain certain events or is dislocated (Laclau 2005). For change due to a crisis of symbols—images and narratives of the self and the other—to take place, new meanings are required to fill the void left by the collapse of the previous hegemonic notions of self and other. As states are always in the process of becoming social constructs (Campbell 1998: 12), state action through discourse is always politically contested by different agents. This produces the crises of meanings that make change possible. Thus, the recognition of the need to build mutual trust between Chile and Bolivia is only possible to understand when crisis is recognized as a constant political phenomenon. “Without crisis, politics would lose its substance and direction. Any political decision is

taken as a response to crises. There are bigger and smaller crises, triggering changes of different magnitude" (Nabers 2009: 193).

However, the new form of othering has to be credible if it is to prevail in the struggle to become a hegemonic interpretation of social reality (Laclau 2000). If the new form of othering is accepted within the state and is reciprocated by the other state, the new form of othering may take root. But if the new form of othering brings about unexpected negative results, the struggle to consolidate the competing forms of othering in the respective official discourses will continue. This struggle to become a hegemonic interpretation of social reality may include crisis, the collapse of the new othering, and a return to the old form.

Despite the fact that there are different juxtapositions of otherness, which demonstrates the complexity of constructing national identities as well as the constant struggle for meaning through such depictions, it is possible to identify a hegemonic form of othering which shapes border relations. Thus, the conceptual discussion of otherness and its many forms can help shed light on how the construction of an interstate culture of rivalry, such as that between Bolivia and Chile, evolves, changes or continues.

However, studying the transformation of interstate cultures—from rivalry to friendship—requires a certain methodological awareness in order to identify the relevant texts. To this end, I first conduct an intertextual analysis in order to shed light on the interrelation of texts and how such texts may have transformative effects on societies (Fairclough 1999: 184-85). Second, I establish contrast in such texts—for example, in a culture of rivalry, the signifiers are rivalry, enmity and distrust; whereas, in a culture of friendship—or in the attempt to build one—there is an emphasis on friendship, amity, brotherhood and mutual trust. Third, I focus on the particular vocabulary politicians and other officials use in their attempts to change forms of othering. Here it is also important to note references to the immediate past in the documents; for example, *in the past we were enemies, but today we are building friendship (or, we are friends)*. This reference to the past found in the documents to build a new present is also a process of differentiation. Finally, I examine relevant texts that are meaningful in a given context (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108) and represent past and present discourses of othering, portraying the counterpart as a rival and/or as a friend. These include the speeches of governmental leaders (presidents) and top officials (ministers and diplomats), as well as official documents from the bilateral relationship, or those referring to the other state, and press declarations. Therefore, the focus of this analysis is the argumentation and the discursive strategies used by different leaders and officials to co-constitute a new social reality regarding the self and the other and, ultimately, a new culture—of friendship as opposed to rivalry—in the interstate relationship between Bolivia and Chile.

3 The Legacy of the Past

3.1 The Historical Context

The Nitrate War (1879-83) between Bolivia and Peru on one side and Chile on the other left a durable legacy of distrust between Bolivia and Chile. These two countries signed a Truce Pact in 1884, which established that Bolivia would administer the territories between the twenty-third parallel and the mouth of the Loa River during the truce (Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1979). The definitive peace and border treaty was signed in 1904. This accord gave Chile definitive control over the above-mentioned territories. In exchange, Bolivia received free transit facilities to export its products through Chilean harbors, along with a railroad between Arica and La Paz and monetary compensation of £300,000 (Hormazábal Diaz 2005: 197; Milet 2004: 38-40). Whereas Chile claims that this was a consensual agreement, Bolivia states that the conditions were imposed upon it (Bolivian Government 2004; Gumicio Granier 2005: 173-75).

Regaining access to the sea began to play a major role in Bolivia's public debate in the second decade of the 1900s, when Bolivia complained about its status to the League of Nations. The main claim made was that the border accord was signed under pressure from Chile. Yet Bolivia's aspiration was to gain access to the sea between Tacna and Arica. These two territories had been under the control of Peru before the war. In 1929 Chile and Peru signed a definitive border accord that gave Tacna to Peru and Arica to Chile. The two countries agreed that no one could unilaterally give a piece of, or the entire, territory covered in this treaty to a third country. Both countries were granted veto power in case the other decided to grant Bolivia access to the sea. However, the real veto power lay with Peru as Bolivia attributed its condition to Chile and thus aspired to access the sea only through Chilean territory (Vial Correa 1996).

Another flare-up of tension in the relationship between Chile and Bolivia, known as the Lauca River issue, occurred in 1962. The conflict was about the use of the water from this international river, which has its origin in Chile and ends in Bolivia. Bolivia accused Chile of diverting the river towards its own territory. Whereas Chile claimed that the river was international and as such it should be able to share it on an equal basis with Bolivia, the latter presented the issue as an attack on its sovereign right to the river. Bolivia politicized the issue by linking it to the question of its access to the sea. Moreover, Bolivia brought its complaint to the Organization of American States (OAS). The Bolivian minister of foreign affairs at the time, Fellman Velarde, stated at the OAS, "This is a solemn opportunity to bring up, once again, the unjust situation — [*sea-access issue*] — that Bolivia has faced in the community of the Americas. This lack of access to the sea impedes Bolivia's abilities to develop itself vis-à-

vis the rest of the continent's countries" (Figueroa 1992: 76).⁵ The minister referred to the Lauca issue as Chilean usurpation of Bolivia's sovereignty (ibid.: 73).

For Chile, the problem of the Lauca River was technical rather than political. However, it tried to impede Bolivia's linking of the Lauca River issue with that of access to the sea. Chile was successful in its strategy as the OAS resolution called only for a peaceful bilateral solution to the river issue. Chile's minister of foreign affairs at the time, Carlos Martínez Sotomayor, highlighted the fact that Bolivia was using the Lauca River issue to bring its aspiration of sovereign access to the Pacific to international forums (Fermandois 2005: 147).

One of the key events in which both countries could have solved the sea-access issue was the Charaña Hug in 1975, under the authoritarian governments of Augusto Pinochet (Chile) and Hugo Banzer (Bolivia). The agreement stated that Chile would grant Bolivia sovereign access to the Pacific through the north of Arica, and that Bolivia would give Chile territorial compensations as a trade-off. As the territories in the north of Arica were formerly Peru's and were included in Chile and Peru's border accord of 1929, the latter used its veto power to block the agreement between Bolivia and Chile. In addition, Peru proposed the creation of a zone of shared sovereignty for the three countries in the Arica province. Chile rejected Peru's proposal on the grounds that it violated Chile's sovereignty, bringing the talks between Bolivia and Chile to a standstill (Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1979). After these events, Chile and Bolivia continued to hold sporadic meetings, but nothing came of them. In fact, they broke off diplomatic relations in 1978 as Bolivia did not feel that Chile was demonstrating real commitment to addressing the question of its access to the sea.

In 1979 Bolivia commemorated the hundredth anniversary of the Nitrate War. It saw the anniversary as an opportunity to bring its demand to multilateral forums. This time, Bolivia's claim got the attention of the OAS member countries. Whereas Bolivia argued that making the issue a multilateral one was its only chance to get Chile's attention, the latter claimed that these forums were not competent to discuss Bolivia's territorial aspirations. Nevertheless, the OAS approved a resolution encouraging the parties to find a solution. It was to include granting Bolivia sovereign access to the Pacific, as well as encouraging Chile to assess the possibility of not asking for territorial compensations. Chile left the room during the discussions and the voting session of this resolution (Figueroa 1992).

After Chile's return to democracy, Chilean president Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994) sought to alleviate the mutual distrust by offering a complementary trade agreement, which both countries signed in 1993. The subsequent Chilean governments of Eduardo Frei (1994-2000) and Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006) tried to further commercial relations between the two countries through the negotiation of a free trade agreement (FTA). However, due to internal opposition in Bolivia and a shift in its economic model, the negotiations fell through. The rationale for Chile promoting commercial accords was to move the bilateral relationship be-

⁵ Author's italics. This quote as well as all others taken from Spanish texts have been translated by the author.

tween the two countries beyond the sphere of security (Wehner 2009). However, the results in terms of improving the bilateral relationship were rather modest for Chile as Bolivia continued to bring up its territorial demands in bilateral and international meetings. The culture of rivalry thus still determined the course of the relationship. In addition, the two countries came into conflict again over the division and use of the Silala River, which begins in Bolivia and ends in Chile.

The historical bilateral relationship between these two countries has oscillated between episodes of tension and moments of relative calm. Yet in both cases the construction of the other as threat, a rival and an inferior has shaped the discursive articulation of the bilateral relationship. Thus, the predominant pattern in the relationship has been distrust, with the exception of the presidencies of Evo Morales and Michelle Bachelet.

3.2 The Past as Identity Builder

The constant re-creation of the consequences of the Nitrate War in both Chile's and Bolivia's collective memories is something difficult to change; such facts have become pillars in the articulation and re-creation of the respective national identities. For example, Bolivia's government has made its status as a landlocked country a special condition that cannot be matched by the other traumatic experiences of its past:

[The Nitrate War] deprived the country of much more than its sovereignty. It took away a fundamental point of gravitation for the nation. The economic potential represented by the Pacific and South Pacific was lost. Bolivia has suffered other territorial losses, in the Plata, the Chaco [and the Amazon], but none have had such repercussions for the nation as the loss of its coastline. (Bolivian Government 2004: 1)

Moreover, losing the war and becoming a landlocked country has shaped Bolivia's national identity. In this sense, Carlos Mesa (2008: 242) writes about the common feeling of Bolivians on the war and Chile:

The sea became the main element of spiritual cohesion for the country. ... The historical defeat is the big element of unity. ... Our kids have been educated under two premises: hate Chile, and maintain the imperative goal of recovering access to the sea. The nonrational and permanent conclusion in Bolivians' hearts is that Chile is the enemy, all that is Chilean is bad for Bolivia, and that Chile has never lost its appetite for taking away Bolivia's territory and wealth.

On the Chilean side, the reason for the historical path of rivalry and the othering of Bolivia as inferior is that Chile's victory became a foundational act for the Chilean state. Joaquín Ferrandois (2005) points to the lack of reinterpretation regarding the war in Chilean historiography and attributes this to the fact that the war has been presented as the final stone in the pillar of Chilean national identity:

In this sense the myth of the war, in other words, its re-creation, became an image that identified the Chilean people as Chileans. It had a high value for the popular culture and civic culture of the country in the twentieth century. ... The national victory achieved through the collective effort of the different social classes was in part due to the deficient preparation of Peru and Bolivia for the war. However, this was not an impediment to the country looking at it—and continuing to look at it—as a “stellar moment”. (Fermandois 2005:37)

The pattern of rivalry is more evident in Bolivia than in Chile because of the former’s desire to revise the borders. However, Chile’s status-quo position, which stresses that there are no pending issues, as well as its construction of itself as superior, also contribute to the rivalrous role relationship (see Thies 2008: 250), making a dialogue to enhance mutual cooperation difficult.

4 The Crises of Othering

Bolivian president Jorge Quiroga (2001-2002) and Chilean president Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006) held negotiations on exporting Bolivian gas to Mexico and the US through a Chilean harbor.⁶ These talks were kept secret to prevent the possible politicization of the issue in Bolivia. Bolivian civil society groups, along with political parties opposed to the government, and political leaders have repeatedly used the issue of access to the sea and the image of Chile as a threat to achieve political goals. Leaders have used them to unify divergent social groups with the purpose of sustaining their own political projects, especially when internal governance crises have taken place.

The leaking of information about the talks on exporting gas to Chile and through Chilean territory changed the nature of the negotiations, as the preliminary agreement did not include the provision of sovereign access to the sea for Bolivia (de Mesa, Gisbert, and Mesa 2007: 597). Chilean and Bolivian media interpreted this as the definitive expiry of Bolivia’s historical claim (Rodríguez Elizondo 2006: 98). This interpretation of events increased the popular and political pressure for Jorge Quiroga, making his presidency a weak one.

The focus of Quiroga and Lagos’s public discourse shifted as the pressure from internal Bolivian groups increased. Instead of negotiating with Chile, Bolivian civil society groups preferred the idea of negotiating with Peru, even though the economic costs of exporting fuel through Peru would be much higher if a Chilean harbor were used. Attempts to establish a more neutral relationship between Chile and Bolivia failed as Bolivia’s president started to other Chile as “rival” in order to accommodate the demands of civil society groups. His othering of Chile as both a rival and a threat was intended to help him both to maintain power and to veto any gas exportation agreement that excluded Bolivia’s sovereign access to the

⁶ These talks were begun during Hugo Banzer’s term. He left the presidency to Quiroga due to a terminal illness.

sea.⁷ The reaction of Chile's president Ricardo Lagos was to highlight his country's status-quo position and to try to separate the border problem from the possible gas exportation agreement (Rodríguez Elizondo 2006: 99).

Despite the fact that Bolivian president Quiroga reversed and hampered the negotiations by referring to Chile as a rival and by raising the issue of sovereign access to the sea once the negotiations became public, he could not keep internal social protests against his government under control. Thus, othering Chile as the external enemy to regain support did not prevent a drop in his popularity, although he was able to finish his brief inherited mandate. Moreover, the hegemonic discourse of Chile as a rival, which had previously been an element unifying Bolivia's social groups behind their leader, faced a crisis: The reference to Chile as a threat lacked credibility since Quiroga had previously been negotiating the export of gas through and to it.

Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (2002-2003), who took power after Quiroga, used soft rhetoric in his relations with Chile with the purpose of achieving an integrative economic agenda. Sánchez de Lozada wanted to negotiate a good deal on the gas issue, but he also wanted to institutionalize the extant trade relationship and increase economic exchange through an FTA, as he was committed to deepening the neoliberal model. Both countries believed that further commercial integration would help to improve their overall relationship (Fundación Democracia y Desarrollo 2003).

Despite efforts on both sides to develop a pragmatic relationship confined to the economic sphere, internal disputes and political instability in Bolivia, and what was seen as Sánchez de Lozada's close relationship with Chile, brought his presidency to an early end (Orgáz García 2004). While the Bolivian president wanted to establish a blueprint for further economic cooperation, the strong anti-Chilean sentiment in Bolivia impeded the negotiation of an FTA. In addition, Bolivia's severe economic problems created the conditions for popular mobilization against the government and its economic pattern. This movement was led by Evo Morales.

The gas issue was also a key reason for the mobilization of civil society groups against Sánchez de Lozada's government (Flemes and Radseck 2009). Multinational companies' technical reports suggested that a gas pipeline should go through Chilean territory. This extra pressure from multinational companies plus the volatility of the political situation in Bolivia made divergent groups react against the possibility of exporting gas through the neighbor country (Villar 2006: 133-134). Sánchez de Lozada was seen as too neoliberal and too close to Chile, thus social movements protested his leadership until he left power. In this case, it was the view of Chile as a rival in the collective memory of Bolivian societal groups that caused them to block Lozada's bilateral agenda with Chile.

⁷ See, for example, Quiroga's speech to the General Assembly of the UN in 2001 in which he links in a rather forceful way the events of 9/11 with those of Bolivia's claim for an outlet to the sea (UN General Assembly A/56/PV.45: 13).

For the different sectors that wanted the resignation of the repudiated president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, the gas issue became the big flag of unity. But more than that, the militant and violent “no” to exporting gas through Chile, and of course to Chile itself, became the main claim and the slogan every day of the conflict. ... It was over this smoky rubble and lost lives that I, Carlos Mesa, came to power to face the Chilean matter. (Mesa 2008: 245)

In order to remain in power in the conflictive internal setting, Carlos Mesa, Sánchez de Lozada’s former vice president, adopted all the postulates that social movements had regarding Chile. In fact, Carlos Mesa called for a referendum to decide whether the gas resources should be nationalized and whether they should be used as a bargaining chip to negotiate an outlet to the sea with Chile (*gas por mar*). Mesa’s rationale for doing this was the preservation of his own power and his ability to govern by unifying the country around an external actor: Chile (see Rodríguez Elizondo 2006: 108; Mesa 2008: 252).

It should be noted that under Carlos Mesa’s presidency, Bolivia brought its maritime claim to various multilateral institutions, such as the UN, and to international leaders such as Jimmy Carter and Kofi Annan, in an attempt to gain international support. Both Carter and Annan showed sympathy and stated their willingness to mediate the negotiation of an outlet to the Pacific. Kofi Annan said, “I have been made aware that access to the sea is a very important matter to the Bolivians and I understand there are conversations under way. I am well-disposed to offer my services to help reach a solution” (Bolivian Government 2004). Neighboring countries, such as Brazil and Argentina, also offered to mediate. Chile’s response focused on preventing both the possible multilateralization of the issue and the use of strong rhetoric by other leaders, such as Hugo Chávez, against Chile. Chile also highlighted the fact that there had been many previous talks between the two governments with the purpose of improving their bilateral relationship and finding a solution to the gas issue. Then-president Lagos also called on Bolivia to focus on building a future relationship rather than referring to the past as an element of disunity (Hormázabal Díaz 2005: 354).

The discourse of Chile as the common external enemy and Chile’s reactions to it partly helped Mesa stay in power for almost two years. His most famous statement regarding Chile was his reply to Ricardo Lagos at the Iberoamerican Summit in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2004: “There is peace but not friendship” (quoted in Hormázabal Díaz 2005: 354). Mesa made this statement after calling on Chile to have a real dialogue over the sea-access issue, to which Lagos had replied, “If it is a matter of dialoguing, I offer you bilateral diplomatic relations here and now” (Ibid.). Mesa’s problem was that othering Chile as a rival was a way to unify the country, but it was not enough to project the image of a government with an agenda for the future or to reverse the extant socioeconomic instability. Therefore, the initial usefulness of this discourse in unifying Bolivia and maintaining power subsided; Mesa could not build an agenda for governing that went beyond the construction of a security threat. The references to Chile as a rival could no longer contain the popular opposition to Mesa’s govern-

ment, and Mesa had to resign as the social pressure increased. His successor was Eduardo Rodríguez, the chief justice of the Supreme Court. He governed from June 2005 to January 2006, though he functioned more as the administrator of the government and called for new elections, which were held in December 2005. These elections brought Evo Morales to power.

On the Chilean side, the support given to Bolivia by leaders such as Kofi Annan and Jimmy Carter, along with Hugo Chávez's supportive rhetoric of wishing to "bathe at a Bolivian beach" (*Latin American Security & Strategic Review* 2003: 2)—and Brazil and Argentina's offers of mediation—brought about a change in Chile's position because the bilateral nature of the sea-access issue was now under question at the international level. This increasing pressure and the danger for Chile of discussing the Bolivian problem in a multilateral setting created a sense of insecurity among Chilean decision makers. The political elite began to reflect upon why its status-quo position regarding Bolivia and its external image were losing credibility in the region. The answer, they determined, was that the construction and projection of Chile as an international success in economic affairs, along with the continuous reference on the part of developed countries and international economic institutions to Chile as a role model for the rest of Latin America were creating resistance in the region (España and Rothery 2004: 79-87; *Latin American Security & Strategic Review* 2003: 2-5). Such resistance to Chile in the regional setting was seen by the Chilean political class as a real opportunity for Bolivia to gain external support for its historical claim.

According to Jorge Larrain (2005), the constant reference beyond Latin America to Chile's successful economic transformation and economic internationalization has enhanced Chile's differentiation of itself as superior to its neighbors. This has made dialogue with these countries difficult. Chile has been criticized for not paying enough attention to the Latin American continent in its external relations. It has also been depicted as too neoliberal, even under the rule of a left-oriented coalition, on a continent where there has been a shift to the left, as the cases of Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay, Ecuador and Bolivia illustrate.

The same author (2005: 7-15) argues that Chile's differentiation of itself as superior vis-à-vis other South American countries is an identity project conducted by economic and political elites in a top-down way, and one that hides the heterogeneity of a nation. Therefore, this self-constructed superiority is only one version of Chile's identity; however, it is the one that prevails in Chile's external (economic) relations and that has to some extent exacerbated the culture of rivalry with border countries, particularly Bolivia and Peru, who demonstrate a lower level of economic performance and whose economic internationalization has been rather limited.

To summarize, Chile's projection of itself as an economically successful country, a projection buttressed by Chile's active security-minded othering of neighbors as inferiors and/or rivals, also faced a crisis of meanings. Chile's previous discourse could no longer explain the development of its relations with Bolivia and other countries in the region. Chile's approach produced a

sense of it being too far away from other Latin American countries, making the advancement of interstate dialogues at the regional level difficult (España and Rothery 2004: 82-87).

Whereas the crisis of meanings for Chile's discourse of economic success and superiority vis-à-vis its neighbors was externally triggered, Bolivia's othering of Chile as a rival faced a crisis because of internal political aspects. Bolivia's othering of Chile as an enemy/threat/rival was used as a discourse by unstable political administrations to regain support and control in the internal political arena. However, this construction of Chile as a rival in order to unify followers behind the Bolivian leader did not prevent the failure of presidencies, as in the case of Carlos Mesa. The portrayal of Chile as an external threat was no longer a guarantee that a leader would be able to hang onto power. Thus a president in Bolivia could fall whether or not he used socially accepted discursive articulations of Chile as a threat. When he took office, President Evo Morales used the internal failure of the previous discourse as an opportunity to initiate a new way of othering Chile.

5 A New Othering Process

The crises faced by the othering discourses in Chile and Bolivia produced a void of meaning in both countries, which had a direct impact on their bilateral relationship. Both countries saw the most important step in changing the culture of rivalry between them as mutual trust building: "The development of mutual trust has become a fundamental pillar in this process" (Chilean Government 2010: 13). Mutual trust as a *sine qua non* for friendship became the new form of othering, through which both countries sought to set the conditions for a process of enduring cooperation.

In addition to developing a discourse centered on mutual trust and friendship, incoming president Evo Morales also displaced the exclusive focus on Chile with the discussion of important aspects in the internal political process—for instance, the proposal of a new constitution (*La Constituyente*). He also created a new internal enemy: the market and its supporters (elite=market vs. pueblo=socialism). By creating a new internal other, Morales was able to remove Chile from the center of debate and concentrate on building a new relationship with it. This new form of othering under the leadership of Evo Morales and Michelle Bachelet has taken the form of *symbolic gestures, new narratives and material cooperation*; the keywords friendship, trust and cooperation have been the constitutive elements.

One of Morales's first symbolic gestures towards Chile was to invite Chilean president Ricardo Lagos to his inaugural ceremony in January 2006. The symbolism lay in the fact that the two countries did not have official diplomatic relations. The last time a Chilean president had taken part in such a ceremony had been 54 years earlier. Michelle Bachelet also invited Morales to her inauguration as president of Chile. The last time a Bolivian leader had attended the inauguration of a Chilean president had also been more than 50 years previous to that.

In addition to these symbolic acts, President Morales and President Lagos held a bilateral meeting during Lagos's official visit to Bolivia in January 2006. In March 2006, presidents Bachelet and Morales also held a bilateral meeting in Santiago. These two meetings were a starting point for a new dialogue and the 13-point bilateral agenda launched in July 2006, of which the first aspect and key component is the development of mutual trust. Presidents Morales and Bachelet met nine times between 2006 and 2007 to advance the dialogue and assess the progress of their bilateral agenda (Estrada 2007).

The establishment of a discourse centered on building mutual trust in order to reshape the Bolivia–Chile relationship was only possible when the lack of trust, which took the form of othering as rivals in competition, was recognized. When Morales met his Chilean counterpart in a bilateral meeting during the XVII Iberoamerican Summit of Santiago 2007, he referred to the talks as a “way to continue building mutual trust.” At the same time he said, “Before we were like enemies, but we are over that and now we have a lot of trust in each other” (Diariocrítico de Bolivia 2007).

To develop this trust further, and to broaden the bilateral dialogue beyond the presidential leadership, both presidents developed a strategy to institutionalize the symbolic gestures and the rhetoric of amity and to encourage a new dialogue between the most relevant actors of each country. Within this framework, both congresses agreed to work together through their respective commissions of foreign affairs, with the aim of building bridges between the two congresses. The first meeting was held in June 2007 in Bolivia and the second meeting in Chile in July 2008 (Senate-Chilean Republic, 2009). The commander-in-chief of the Chilean Navy then visited his counterpart in Bolivia (Estrada 2007), and the Bolivian minister of defense, Walker San Miguel, visited Chile in 2007 and 2008. The latter visit was conceived of as a way to show solidarity following the eruption of the Chaiten Volcano, which destroyed a city of the same name in the south of Chile. However, the development of mutual trust and the bilateral dialogue were also encouraged in other ministries, such as those for health, infrastructure and culture, and Chile and Bolivia have established communication channels between civil society groups in the two countries (Bolivian Ministry of Foreign Relations 2008: 2-6).

The gestures to develop mutual trust between the two countries were also intended to shift the exclusive focus of the relationship away from the gas issue (*gas por mar*). In fact, the gas issue was contained within the thirteenth point of the agenda, under the umbrella of other issues. The purpose of putting the gas issue under the label of other issues was to depoliticize and disconnect the issue from the border problem by sending clear and concrete messages to Bolivian civil society, as well as to prevent Chile from being othered as a rival again. With regard to the internal pressure to once again bring the *gas por mar* issue to the forefront in Bolivia's relationship with Chile, the Consul General of Bolivia in Chile, Roberto Finot, stated, “‘Gas for sea’ is not a good equation; it is not viable. ... Another inopportune phrase [that has come up in this debate] is ‘not even a molecule of gas.’ [Saying that] would

disturb [our current negotiations]; ... it will lead us into a fight" (Estrada 2007). In addition, Evo Morales "criticized some of the leaders of the opposition in the Santa Cruz district, who wanted to 'politicize' the demand of getting an outlet to the Pacific" and he asked them "to change their mentality" (La Segunda 2009).

It is important to mention that this construction of a new other and the eventual consolidation of hegemonic discourses about the self and the other are social processes. It is clear that Bolivia lost access to the sea because of the war in the nineteenth century and that Chile gained new territory at Bolivia's expense. This fact in part determined Bolivia's conception of Chile (the other) as a rival and Chile's conception (as the winner and the status-quo party) of Bolivia as inferior. However, it is no less true that the reference to Chilean bravery in the war has shaped not only Chilean national identity but also how the war is constantly re-created in the collective memory—through public commemorations of the Chilean soldiers' bravery. The same applies to Bolivia's Day of the Sea, during which Chile is vilified as the country that took away its land.

The socially constructed dimension of past episodes is expressed by the fact that such commemorations have typically been only for Chileans on the Chilean side and only for Bolivians on the Bolivian side. What I mean is that such commemorations have not left room for recognizing or referring to the counterpart as anything other than a threat or a rival. However, the crises in both countries with respect to the discourse of the other made it possible to begin to refer to the other as a friend; for instance, in 2007 the Chilean army under President Bachelet paid tribute to the Bolivian hero of the Nitrate War, Eduardo Abaroa. A Bolivian delegation led by the minister of defense, Walker San Miguel, and the commander-in-chief of the army, General Wilfredo Vargas, attended the ceremony, held in the Chilean city of Calama. In Bolivia, the minister of the presidency thanked Chile on behalf of the executive branch for its gesture and stated, "Bolivia wants to close the pages of the past and open up new opportunities to re-establish solid and consistent diplomatic relations that can provide new development opportunities for our nations" (Emol 2007).

President Morales also reciprocated and expressed thanks for the Chilean gesture, part of what both presidents defined as the actions to develop mutual trust, in his speech to commemorate the Day of the Sea on March 23, 2008. The Day of the Sea had normally been used to enhance Bolivia's goal of gaining access to the Pacific, and the day became a symbol of national unity through the references to Chile as a threat and a rival in official government speeches and TV spots (Aliaga Sáez 2006: 12-15). In his speech, however, Evo Morales emphasized the fact that both countries had been working on healing the past:

What we have to say with all sincerity is that we have established an important basis for developing mutual trust from *pueblo* to *pueblo* and from government to government with our neighbor brother, the Republic of Chile. I understand that to solve any issue, be it national, familial or international, with our neighbors, mutual trust is the most important aspect. Trust between the social forces of Bolivia and Chile, trust between

the military forces of Bolivia and those of Chile. We acknowledged that last year, for the first time in history, Chile's army paid tribute to Mr. Eduardo Abaroa. These are important steps and clear signs that these two countries want to solve a historical problem, the issue of the sea. (Morales 2008)

The symbolic gestures and new narratives intended to change the culture of rivalry to one of friendship have also been accompanied by the promotion of material cooperation, for instance, a bi-oceanic highway that will join Brazil, Bolivia and Chile. Chilean president Michelle Bachelet, in an official visit to La Paz in 2007 to launch the construction of the highway, emphasized the progress of the relationship by highlighting the pattern of amity that both countries have developed.

This is the third time I have come to Bolivia as president. The first time I stayed in Cochabamba, then in Tarija, and now in La Paz. This shows the friendship and the sincere interest that Chile has in integration, and it also shows the great friendship with *el pueblo* and the Bolivian government. ...This conviction regarding how important it is to integrate our countries comes along with concrete actions. Today in the afternoon along with President Morales and Lula we are going to launch the development of a bi-oceanic outlet. (Bachelet 2007)

In 2008 Chile also granted Bolivia the right to use Iquique's harbor to import goods from overseas, according to a regime of the free transit of goods. Moreover, Chile and Bolivia signed a memorandum of understanding on security and defense that will serve as pillar for institutionalizing cooperation in these areas. There is also an ongoing program to implement binational border controls such as that at Visviri-Charaña. These material cooperation programs are presented in the official documents of the Chilean and Bolivian governments, or in joint declarations, as the natural consequence of building mutual trust (see Chilean Government 2010: 13-15; Bolivian Ministry of Foreign Relations 2008: 1-10).

Many of the above measures are constitutive elements of the 13-point bilateral cooperative agenda. One of the most controversial points of the agenda, along with the maritime issue, is the dispute over the water resources of the Silala River. Chile and Bolivia have reached a preliminary agreement that will last four years and is to be replaced with a new long-term agreement based on the results of further studies on the division of the water resources. If the parties cannot reach a long-term agreement, the old legal text will be extendable on a yearly basis. In the final draft version of the preliminary agreement of July 28, 2009, both countries strongly emphasized that the ability to deal with such a sensitive issue was a consequence of the trust that had been cultivated: "The atmosphere of mutual trust that both countries have developed has allowed both countries' wills to be brought together in order to deepen the mutual understandings that the 'pueblos' aspire to through the formation of an accord of mutual benefit on this point of the bilateral agenda" (Bolivian Ministry of Foreign Relations 2009: 1).

6 Conclusion

The approach to othering the counterpart as a friend, which has recently been pursued by Chile's and Bolivia's leaders and expressed in the discourse of building mutual trust, has filled the void of meaning left by the crisis in the discourse of the other as a rival, a threat and/or inferior. The transition from one form of othering (rival, threat, inferior) to another (friend) is only possible to understand when a crisis of meanings occurs in hegemonic discourses. Crisis as a constant political phenomenon allows us to understand the collapse of previous ways of othering the counterpart and the changes in and struggles over meanings to explain new constructed political realities. Crisis explains the emergence of a new form of otherness that is now shaping the relationship between Bolivia and Chile. However, political leaders, as presented in this article, are also an important element in displacing the old form of othering in the speech acts of each state, in developing a new way of referring to the counterpart in the collective memory, and in impeding the recurrence of the former image of the other state.

Bolivia and Chile have pursued a policy of developing mutual trust as a way of establishing enduring friendship and cooperation. Whether this policy has completely replaced the culture of rivalry is not clear yet; a reversion to the previous form of othering—that is, from friendship to rivalry—is still possible. The construction of the other as a friend still faces challenges such as the issue of maritime access for Bolivia. If a solution to this issue is not reached, the discourse based on mutual trust may become an empty vessel, and the former articulations of the other may again gain the upper hand. In addition, the possible delay in talks on the sea-access issue could give the rivalry discourse new momentum within Bolivia, especially among leaders who seek to contest Morales's project and his intention to establish an enduring relationship with Chile.

On the Chilean side, it is not clear whether the new center-right government will be willing to discuss the sea-access issue. During the presidential campaign, current president Sebastián Piñera (2010-present) was reluctant to discuss the idea of an outlet to the coast for its neighbor. Last but not least, if an agreement between the countries is eventually reached and involves the territories included in Peru and Chile's treaty of 1929, Peru will also have to be included in such talks. What is clear so far is that Bolivian president Morales and former Chilean president Bachelet have changed the relationship of their countries by constructing a new discourse, the pillar of which is the development of mutual trust. What remains to be seen is the durability of such an approach.

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