

Socializing Brazil into Regional Leadership: The 2006 Bolivian Gas Crisis and the Role of Small Powers in Promoting Master Roles Transitions

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In this article we show that small powers are able to socialize regional leaders using altercasting strategies. The altercasting operates within the leader's role repertoire replacing the master role—natural leader—with a previously inactive role—regional paymaster. This process is only possible because altercasting empowers domestic oppositions and recalcitrant secondary powers against the leader's initial master role, which is perceived as inadequate or unfair, unbalancing the leader's decision-making process towards an entire master role remaking. Since the regional community is a projection of the regional leader's values and interests, altercasting represents an effective bottom-up strategy available for small powers to socialize regional leaders and change their local community. We propose a theory refinement on master role transitions based on a mechanism that incorporates altercasting, domestic, and regional contestation concepts. We develop our argument using a case study—the 2006 Bolivian gas crisis.

Introduction

Brazil is considered a regional leader in South America with material capacities standing out when compared to its neighborhood. However, having more material capability does not indicate that Brazil's regional leadership is secured and certain; on the contrary, Brazil suffers a “contested leadership” by secondary powers, such as Argentina, Chile, and Venezuela. The existence of reluctant secondary powers is expected in regional arenas, but are they the only states that successfully challenge regional leaders?

In this article we show that the implementation of regional leaderships is not secured only by socializing reluctant secondary powers but also by how small powers, which more often execute the role of “follower,” react to socializing schemes promoted by regional leaders. Research about the strategies employed by these

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weaker states to influence the establishment of regional leaderships is virtually nonexistent. Furthermore, the literature has not yet analyzed if and how small powers are able to socialize regional leaders.

We propose a mechanism in which an altercasting—a strategy of manipulating one’s own role-taking behavior to shape the role of another actor—by a small power is able to replace a regional leader’s dominant master role—natural leader—by an inactive role—regional paymaster. Operating within the leader’s role repertoire, the altercasting triggers domestic audiences and recalcitrant secondary powers against the leader’s initial master role, which is perceived as inadequate or unfair, unbalancing the leader’s decision-making process towards a master role remaking. Since the regional community is a projection of the regional leader values and interests, altercasting represents an effective bottom-up strategy available for small powers to socialize regional leaders and change the local community.

By showing that changes in the most salient role of a materially preponderant state can be caused by small power actions, the model poses a problem for the relationship between material and ideational qualities in role transitions. If, as understood by the literature, master role is synonymous to status (regional power, great power, novice, etc.), then changes in the most salient role cannot be properly understood without changes in the material structure. However, our analysis proposes the opposite, that is, changes in master roles do not always need changes in the material structure to occur. Thus, we aim to refine the relationship between roles and status by transcending the structural understanding of master roles only as status positions in order to better apprehend master roles transitions based solely on performative aspects.

This argument is explored in a case study where Brazil’s leadership role was contested by altercasting strategies designed and implemented by Bolivia—the 2006 Bolivian Gas Crisis. The regional leader was constrained by the Bolivian discourse that characterized Brazil as an “imperial state,” unbalancing regional and domestic audiences against Brazil, which eventually forced the leader to accommodate Bolivian demands and change its own master role within the region. The final result of that crisis was a reshaped regional community where the previous role of hesitant leader performed by Brazil was changed into a role of *de facto* regional paymaster due to a Bolivian altercasting strategy.

The article is divided into three parts: first, we propose our theoretical model on master roles transitions; second, we apply our model to the case study; and finally, we draw conclusions.

Master Roles Transitions in Regional Leadership Enactments

Regional leadership is a disputed concept studied by a broad group of scholars.¹ Definitions present several criteria, such as: claims to leadership, possession of necessary power resources, employment of foreign policy instruments, and acceptance by third states.² Nevertheless, while Brazil is recognized as a regional leader, the implementation of its leadership is constrained by secondary powers that do not fully recognize Brazil’s claims, creating several obstacles to the full establishment of

¹ See Destradi 2010, Lemke 2010, Prys 2010, Nabers 2008, Flemes 2007 and 2010, Flemes and Wojcewski 2010, Dent 2008, Van Langenhove and Zwartjes 2012, Pinheiro and Gaio 2014, and Merke 2015. Sometimes the concept appears intertwined with established concepts, such as regional hegemony. See Tallberg 2006, Young 1991, Ikenberry 1996, Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990, Kindleberger 1981, Rosencrance and Taw 1990, Lake 1993, and Vieira and Alden 2011.

² The concept of regional leader is different from regional power. Although they are usually seen as equivalents, regional leadership is a matter of choice and recognition, whereas regional powerhood is often related to capacity. See Nolte 2010, Lemke 2010, and Flemes 2007. In this context, authors argue that Brazil is recognized as a regional leader under the umbrella of a cooperative consensus-seeking actor. See Wehner 2015b; Burges 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2015, Pinheiro and Gaio 2014.

a regional leadership. Many authors point out that countries like Argentina, Chile, and Venezuela are the main opposition to Brazil in South America.³

However, secondary powers are not the only states challenging regional leaders. Our analysis shows that small powers can also play such a role. Yet, the literature on regional leadership deals only laterally with small powers, implicitly assuming that, due to their material weakness, they can only “follow” the leader (or a revisionist state), rarely being able to influence the community by their own initiative.⁴

We illustrate that this is not always the case and that small countries can either facilitate or make the establishment of the leadership more complicated and costly. In this context, it seems evident that the instruments available to small powers to promote socialization are not materialistically based but rather identity related. Thus, we believe that introducing role theory into the analysis of regional leadership allows us to understand how small powers operate in the process of socializing leaders and changing regional communities.⁵

The concept of “role” refers to both positions in an organized group and any category of actors’ identities socially recognized by Others (Biddle 1986, 69). There are three types of actors in role enactment processes: the role performer, the performers of counter roles, and the audience, that is, those who observe the interaction between the first two. Roles do not exist alone because for every role performed there is an explicit or implicit counterrole. In any interaction an actor finds itself within a specific social structure, something the literature calls a “role location” process—the actor must select a role appropriate for itself and the Others for each situation (Thies 2009, 9–12). In this sense, the roles of regional leader or small power are not static but fluid and contingent to specific scenarios in which multiple roles operate simultaneously, deriving from a specific distribution of regional identities and perceptions.

In any role location process, actors can choose roles strategically in order to achieve specific goals.⁶ In this situation, altercasting becomes an important strategy available to any actor to improve its gains by changing roles initially ascribed by Others. The literature defines altercasting as “projecting an identity, to be assumed by other(s) with whom one is in interaction, which is congruent to one’s own goals.” This means that the actor seeks to “persuade Others of their definitions of their role, by seeking to change the role of Others” and by manipulating “the cues in the encounter in order to influence selectively Alter’s definition of the situation” (Weinstein and Deustchberger 1963, 454–55). Therefore, the actual role-taking of each actor is a result of this process since the Other is also trying to do the same thing (McCourt 2012, 380).

In a thoughtful advancement, Malici (2006, 131) has conceptualized altercasting as a conscious manipulation of one’s own role-taking behavior to shape the role of another actor, usually a counterrole. Altercasting is a “technique of inter-actor control in which Ego uses tactics of self-presentation and stage management in an attempt to frame Alter’s definition of the situation in ways that create the role that Ego desires Alter to play.” Thus, Ego tries to induce Alter to take on a new role and thereby enlist Alter in Ego’s effort to change itself by treating Alter as if it already

³ See Flesmes and Wojczewski 2010, Flesmes and Lobell 2015, Lobell et al. 2015, Malamud 2011, Malamud and Rodríguez 2013, Wehner 2015a, 2015b and 2016, Flesmes and Wehner 2015, Merke 2015, Gardini 2016, and Schenoni 2012.

⁴ This can be seen in Flesmes and Wojczewski 2010, Burges 2007, Thorburn 2007, and Mares 1988. Studies usually acknowledge only two strategies for weaker states in asymmetric relations—balancing and bandwagoning. See Scholvin 2012; Gardini 2016; and Flesmes and Lobell 2015. One of the few studies that show contestation from a small power is Lambert 2016.

⁵ The use of role theory to analyze regional leadership has not been yet directly used. That is, the term is usually approached laterally, through the idea of “national role conception” or by the use of typologies of roles, without taking “advantage of the explanatory power of role theory’s many rich concepts.” See Alden and Schoeman 2013, Burges 2006, Park 2013, Prys 2008, Easley 2012, Thies 2009.

⁶ See McCourt 2011 for a description of this strategic use of roles in Argentina’s behavior in the 1982 Falklands War.

had that role. By treating the other as if it is to respond in a certain way, Ego is trying to teach its definition of the situation to Alter. If Alter is willing to learn, then both actors will emerge with a newly created intersubjective understanding of each other.

Since altercasting is able to activate conflicts within Alter's role repertoire, it is possible that such strategy is also capable of replacing master roles by auxiliary roles.⁷ According to Thies (2001, 708; 2009, 12), a master role is a role salient in every situation and therefore associated with a more stable social status position. However, in this paper we argue that an interaction between a material preponderant state and a small power can produce a master role transition without the corresponding change in the material and social structure.

This possibility represents a puzzle for the way the relationship between master role and master status is currently understood by the literature. Thies' conception of master roles essentially equates a structural property of the actor (social status) to its most salient behavioral attribute (master role), making it difficult to fully comprehend saliency changes inside actors' role repertoires without corresponding changes in the material structure. While Wehner (2015a) advances this by highlighting the importance of interactions in defining status, the concepts of master role and status are still treated as synonymous, being restricted to a set of positions in the international system (novice state, great power, regional power, etc.).

Although the selection of roles is indeed limited by a social structure, making roles a function of status (Thies 2012, 33–34), we believe they should be treated as different concepts. To say that an actor has regional power status allows one to infer possible behavioral patterns (the roles of regional leader, imperial power or detached power, for instance), but does not allow one to deduce their saliency in the actor's role repertoire. Thus, by equating master roles and status, the idea of master role transitions is reduced to structural changes in the system, overshadowing the part played by aspects such as domestic disputes and changes in external expectations, such as regional contestation.

Evidently, if master roles cease to be understood as synonymous with status, this should affect the theoretical relationship between master and auxiliary roles. Thies (2012, 33–34) argues that status sets possible auxiliary roles a state should expect to achieve. While this does not necessarily follow for the relationship between master and auxiliary roles, one should expect the most salient role to pose limits to the enactment of auxiliary roles. Assuming states avoid situations of role conflict or cognitive dissonance, the enactment of roles that negatively affect the most salient role would normally be avoided.

The relationship between master and auxiliary roles is not peaceful. Contested and dormant roles circulate within the actor's role repertoire (Cantir and Kaarbo, 16–18). Aggestam (2006, 23) argues that one of the most visible stimuli for role change is the appearance of role conflict within the actor's role-set. Role conflict appears "when dominant role conceptions in the role-set are incompatible with one another" and "when the conditions and context within which they were originally formulated change."⁸

In the context of regional interactions, Wehner (2015b, 438) argues that the interplay between master and auxiliary roles should be understood from the perspective of the Others' expectations in a social interaction and not solely from a process of locating the master role within the regional material structure. In this sense, the role of regional leader sets a limited repertoire of related roles—hesitant, natural, paymaster, aggressive, or hegemonic.⁹ However, only one of them will become the

⁷ Walker refers to roles as repertoire of behaviors inferred from others' expectations and one's own conceptions, selected at least partly in response to cues and demands. See Walker 1992, 23.

⁸ As Harnisch (2012, 49) states, "any mix of increased intra-role complexity or complex inter-role conflicts may heighten the potential for creative role interpretations by role beholders and thus for role learning."

⁹ On the roles Brazil plays in Latin America, see Lima and Hirst 2006, Burges 2008 and 2009, and Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007.

master role. The saliency will depend not only on the leader's own role-taking process but also on the way it interacts with Others and, more importantly, on how Others perceive one's role-location process. Thus, the leader does not fully control its role repertoire, depending on interactions and counterroles created within the regional community.

It is important to remember that the leader also prescribes roles to Others, such as followers or partners.¹⁰ In the case of regional structures, the role prescriptions given to Others (small and secondary powers) by the leader are key to understanding how the local community is built in terms of values, rules, and institutions. Usually, regional communities represent the projection of leaders' preferences and the way they prescribe roles to Others.¹¹ On the other hand, leadership contestation means a refusal from smaller or secondary powers to accept roles ascribed to them by regional leaders.¹² The acceptance of the leader's prescribed roles to Others and to itself turns the community into a projection of the leader's preferences, but the rejection of these same prescribed roles by secondary or small powers creates regional role-conflicts among actors and within the leader's role repertoire.¹³

In the context of developing countries' interactions, two historical roles stand out: victim and imperialist.¹⁴ If the regional leader is also a developing country, then having another poor country framing oneself as imperialist or hegemonic undermines the leaders' capacity to represent the region in third scenarios.¹⁵ Furthermore, *Lobell et al.* (2015, 141) argue that secondary powers would most likely reject imperialistic actions by a regional leader, undermining the leader's capacity to project its leadership globally.

In the case of regional leadership enactment an altercasting would mostly empower opposite dormant and auxiliary roles—victim and paymaster—against the dominant role of natural leader. The leader's response to an altercasting that frames the leader as imperialistic and puts the small power into the position of victim is, first, the rejection of the imperialistic role, normally activated by the leader's own traumatic experiences as victim in the past and, second, the adoption of a more benign role in accordance with secondary and small powers preferences, such as regional paymaster or public-goods provider.¹⁶ As a consequence of counterrole-taking, the leader identifies itself with the victim, creating a conflict between the role of natural leader and that of victim, pushing the leader toward remaking its regional role.¹⁷

Prior to this interaction, the paymaster role had very low salience in the leader's repertoire. The leader's response to the altercasting is not merely a question of adjusting to an auxiliary role enactment but also a change in its salience, with a

¹⁰ Walker argues that actions always take place within a position, that is, a system of role prescriptions given by actors in a relationship. On role prescriptions see [Walker 1987](#).

¹¹ [Nolte \(2010, 891\)](#) argues that, from the perspective of regional powers, regional institutions may be an instrument of domination and a mechanism to keep other powers out of the region.

¹² See [Flemes and Lobell 2015](#); [Flemes and Wojczewski 2010](#); and [Malamud 2011](#).

¹³ We assume secondary regional powers are usually a regional leader's primary socializers due to their bigger material and immaterial resources. Therefore, their reactions to the altercast would probably be more important in an attempt to influence the leader's performance. On primary socializers, see [Beneš and Harnisch 2014, 05](#).

¹⁴ These two roles are related to the leader's historical self. They are not created by the altercasting but activated and retrieved from the roles repertoire. See [Beneš and Harnisch \(2014\)](#) for a discussion on historical role experiences' impact on role composition. On developing countries roles repertoire, see [Sekhri 2009](#).

¹⁵ A key attribute of being a regional leader is the capacity and legitimacy to represent the region abroad. See [Nolte 2010, 892](#).

¹⁶ In role theory discussions, internalizing Others' expectations is captured through the concept of "role taking," seen as essential for decision makers to "gain a sense of the appropriate and possible responses to a given situation." See [McCourt 2012, 379](#).

¹⁷ This conflict alludes to the concepts of "tradition" and "dilemmas" in foreign policy. See [Wehner and Thies 2014](#).

transition of the paymaster role from an auxiliary to a master role.¹⁸ The paymaster role has a tendency toward self-reinforcement over time because, once it is clear that its enactment is possible, depending only on conscious action by the regional leader, small and secondary powers will not accept the enactment of the “natural leader” role anymore. This will probably not be restricted to this particular interaction but rather become the leader’s prevailing role in future regional interactions.¹⁹

Yet, regional factors are not solely responsible for the altercasting reinforcement. We claim that an altercasting promoted by a weaker state—for example, claiming that the regional leader is imperialist—is also able to empower domestic groups among the leader’s society that favor other national roles conceptions, unbalancing the minimum consensus within decision-making process that supported the initial master role. Domestic groups usually support dormant auxiliary roles that are perceived as more benign or favorable to them and to the community.²⁰ In this sense, the altercasting falls within the dissension among the political elite about what are the country’s master or auxiliary roles and which one should prevail.²¹

Indeed, the role-remaking represents a socialization of the leader’s role conceptions into something more similar to the small powers’ values and preferences; however, understanding how small powers socialize powerful countries seems unusual to the literature on socialization. In general, studies show that socialization entails an assimilation process whereby interests and identities of the less powerful change into something similar to the community controlled by the more powerful. Socialization, thus, represents a top-down relationship where the more powerful uses a variety of normative and material instruments to socialize the weaker state into its community of values and interests.²²

Still, in our understanding, even though studies usually focus on these top-down relationships, they are not an essential part of socialization. Socialization entails three essential components:²³ a socializing actor (or structure), some sort of content socialized (norms, values, preferences, roles, etc.), and a previously existing community.²⁴ Even though socialization is structured in a power asymmetry, it is also a process of negotiation and mutual accommodation where weaker states also exert influence on the powerful actors ([Thies 2001](#), 702–3; [Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990](#), 293).

This aspect of socialization, however, has been overlooked by the literature, lacking further theorization. In this sense, we believe the study of regional leadership allows us to understand how leaders also need to internalize their followers’ expectations to secure leadership and how it is possible for followers to act strategically in order to socialize the leader, trying to shape the leader’s role location process in a

¹⁸We identify this transition with a role-remaking process in order to adjust to social pressure. On master role and status transitions, see [Stryker and Statham 1985](#), 05 and [Thies 2012](#), 34.

¹⁹This is hinted in other interactions, such as the renegotiation of the energy price of the Itaipú Dam with Paraguay. See [Lambert 2015](#).

²⁰The literature assumes that roles may be partially built domestically. The notion of national roles suggests some degree of unity and agreement among domestic elites, although this is not always the case. It is unclear how much opposition there is in a society with regard to a particular role ([Cantir and Kaarbo 2012](#), 7–8).

²¹Domestic role contestation occurs due to several factors, such as diverging bureaucratic interests, internal division in coalition governments, or civil society pressures. See [Wehner and Thies 2014](#), 419–20; [Brummer and Thies 2015](#), 278–80; and [Cantir and Kaarbo 2012](#), 8–12.

²²On socialization see [Alderson 2001](#), [Thies 2001](#) and 2011, [Checkel 2005](#), and [Zürn and Checkel 2005](#). For the instruments used in socialization, see [Zürn and Checkel 2005](#), 805.

²³See [Alderson 2001](#), [Checkel 2005](#), [Checkel 2005](#), [Alderson 2001](#), and [Thies 2001](#), 2003 and 2012.

²⁴Another essential component is what [Checkel \(2005, 804\)](#) calls a change from the logic of consequences to the logic of appropriateness, that is, when the socialized actor ceases to have a solely interest-based behavior towards the community and starts to act and recognize itself as a full member, taking on the community’s expectations as their own.

way that fits their interests and values and, as consequence, helping to change the regional community.²⁵

Therefore, in traditional regional communities where relationships are embedded in customary and historical integration schemes, the idea of socializing regional leaders presupposes reversing the definition of socialization. In this case, socialization is accomplished not by adjustment to top-down social pressures but by the leader's role learning process after a small power altercasting. In traditional socialization schemes, the socialized actor is changed more profoundly, while the community is only slightly modified. However, changing the leader's master role means changing the community itself since regional communities represent the projected values and norms of their leaders.²⁶ Thus, leader socialization represents a particular type of socialization process, differing from those related to novice states. In the bottom-up approach suggested here, socialization is measured by the master role remaking within the leader role repertoire, as well as by how this process has been ignited by altercasting techniques operating both at regional and domestic levels.

In sum, the current literature on role transition fails to incorporate more dynamic and simultaneous interactions among several actors—domestic opposition, secondary powers, and weaker states—in master role enactment processes. The notion that an altercasting promoted by a small power is able to trigger a strategic alignment between domestic opposition groups and uncomfortable secondary powers in order to change the master role of a materially preponderant power poses a challenge for the relationship between material and ideational qualities in role theory. Our mechanism suggests that it is possible to think beyond material structural dominance as a limitation for master role transitions. Finally, the ultimate by-product of such interactions is a bottom-up socialization process in which the master role of a regional leader has been changed exclusively on performative strategies, which reinforces the idea that the establishment of regional leaderships is intertwined with local small powers' performative actions and perceptions.

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Our model of leader socialization is divided into two parts—the first focuses on how the small power's altercasting triggers the leader socialization process; the second looks at the leader's role-remaking process. Although they occur simultaneously, we have separated them into two images to facilitate the exposure of the model. Thus, [Figure 1](#) shows the interaction between the regional leader, the small power, and the regional audience, while [Figure 2](#) illustrates the changes in the regional leader's role repertoire at the time of these interactions.

In order to develop the first part, we modified a model proposed by [Thies \(2012\)](#). The original model is a game about the adoption of a single role by a novice state, but, as hinted by the author, it can be adapted for other situations since it involves the choice of a role and the reaction of others to that choice. The game is made up of three players: nature (which can be related to the structure of the system and/or the audience of interested third parties), the emerging state (the state that claims a role), and the socializing state (usually a great power or a regional power). For the purpose of this article we reversed these given roles, the regional leader being the object of socialization and the small power the socializing state.

In [Figure 2](#) we show simultaneous changes in the leader role repertoire during the interaction with three actors: the socializing state (the small power), the domestic opposition, and the regional audience. Initially, the leader has a master

²⁵ This perspective is apparent in the discussion on the rise of China, through the idea of a strategy of "engagement," understood as seeking to "socialize" the rising power by encouraging its satisfaction with the evolving global or regional order." See [Johnston and Ross 1999](#), XI–XV.

²⁶ Thies argues that for Waltz (1979) socialization produced some sort of "sameness" effect. Undoubtedly, small powers would conform to what the international system dictates, or they will fail to survive. But Thies also alerts that socialization is an ongoing process where rivalries or friendships are ongoing dyadic processes with no static positions that occur within a competitive environment. See [Thies 2001](#), 700.

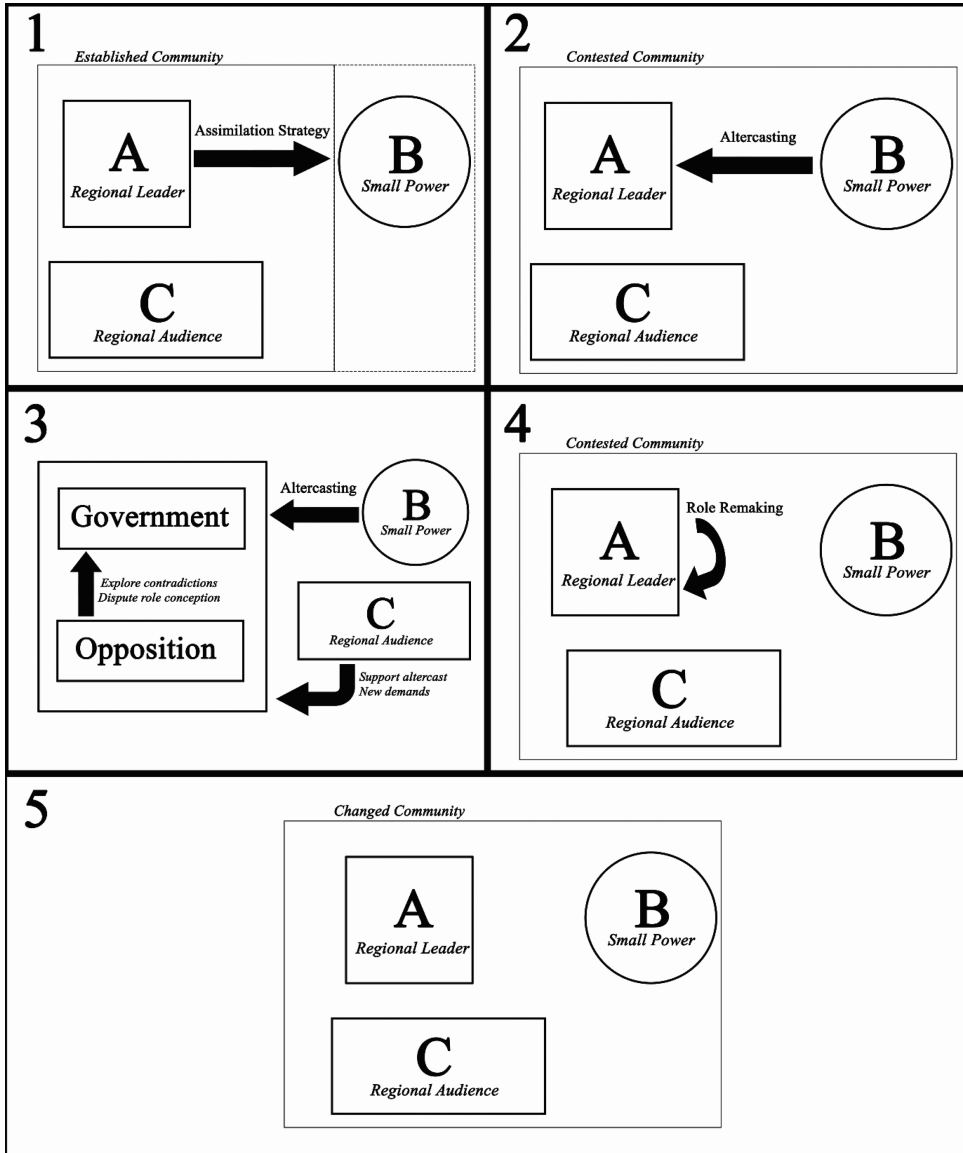


Figure 1. Leader Socialization Model—regional interactions and master role transition.

role—natural leader—and other roles of varying salience within its role repertoire—for example, hesitant leader, hegemonic leader, and regional paymaster. Once the socializing state starts to altercast with the leader—projecting the role of imperialist—secondary regional powers project the same negative role towards the leader. This simultaneous projection empowers domestic oppositions, who perceive the strategic opportunity and start to positively value an opposite and dormant role—regional paymaster—which is eventually supported also by both the socializing state and regional audience. This strategic alignment between three actors makes the initial master role inadequate to Others' expectations and promotes a role conflict within the leader's role repertoire, making it impossible for the leader to sustain it and even more costly to accept the negative role projected by Others. Finally, the

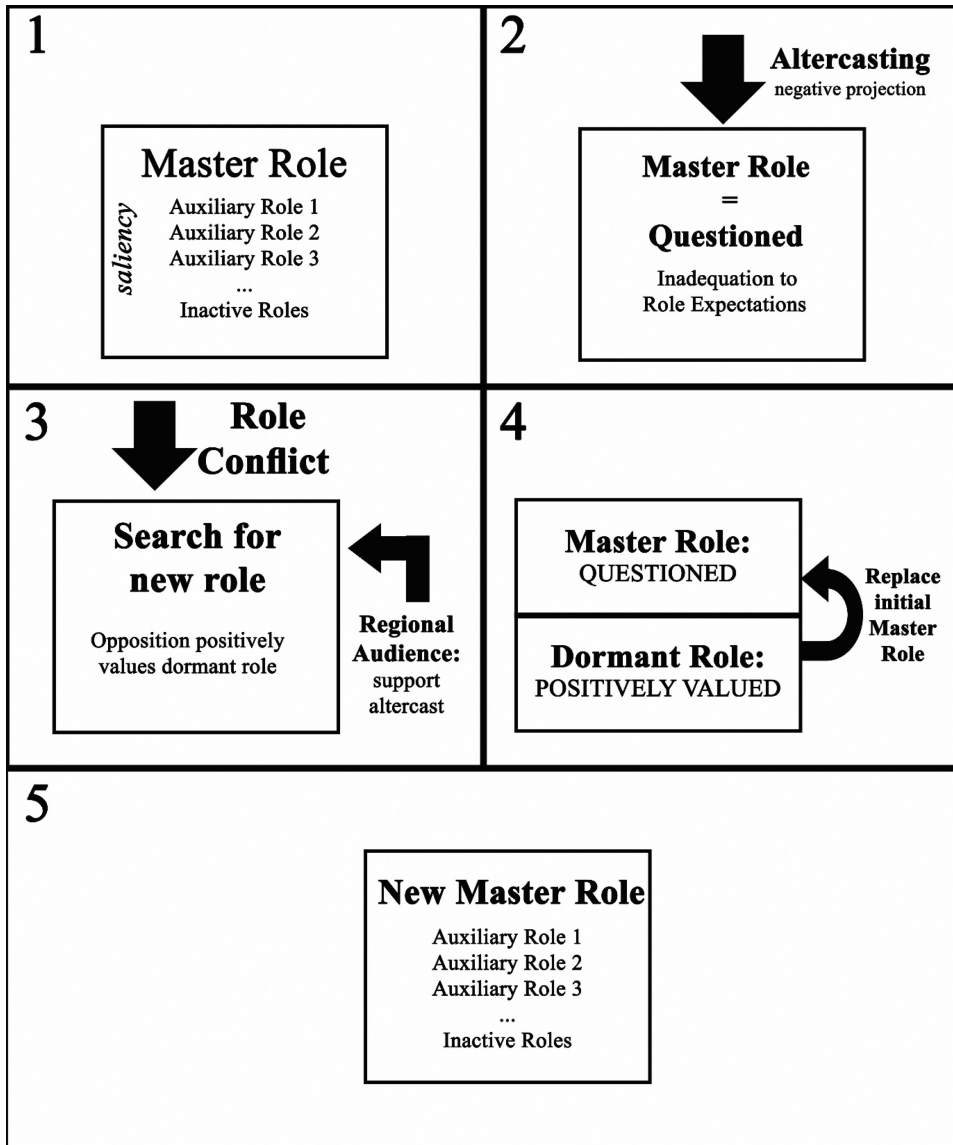


Figure 2. Leader Socialization Model—domestic groups and master role transition.

internal role conflict pushes forward one of the dormant roles—regional paymaster—to become the new master role.

The 2006 Bolivian Gas Crisis

The discussion about what should be Brazil’s appropriate roles in the international scenario, especially in South America, leads to heated debates among the local elite.²⁷ Two positions in these debates seem relevant for the purpose of this study. For the first group, regional leadership is not seen as a necessary step to achieve

²⁷ These debates reveal what Cantir and Kaarbo (2012) term “horizontal contestation” of roles. See Lafer 2000 or Guimarães 1999, for illustrative examples. They can easily be related to Brazil’s role conceptions. When focusing on what Beneš and Harnisch (2014) term the “self-composition dimension” of Brazilian role conception, one notices the predominance of the Ego over the Alter in the traditional discourse.

greater power in the global arena; Brazil should see the region as a market for Brazilian companies, reducing regional integration as a tool to improve its domestic capitalism. The supporters of these ideas are averse to a paymaster role, preferring conceptions of hesitant, natural, or even aggressive leadership. In the view of the second group, the region is understood as a “platform for the international,” and Brazil should be a “mediator” and “representative” of South American interests on the global stage; this is where a positive and self-sustained regional integration would be absolutely necessary to achieve its goals, its supporters defending paymaster, as well as natural and hegemonic conceptions of leadership.²⁸

This was the Brazilian role set debate in 2006 when Bolivia decided to nationalize its own gas production. On one hand, Brazil had recent initiatives suggesting its willingness to become the region paymaster and active leader,²⁹ but, on the other, the Brazilian elite was divided on the importance of such a role.³⁰ More importantly, Brazilian previous behavior toward Bolivia had showed its hesitation in enacting the paymaster role.³¹ That is, claiming regional leadership was not necessarily followed by concrete material measures that characterize the paymaster role, one of the most important aspects of regional leadership.³²

On December 18, 2005, Evo Morales Ayma was elected president of Bolivia with 54 percent of the votes and promised to “put an end to the colonial state and the neoliberal model,” with a special focus on “ending the permanent theft of Bolivian natural resources” through the “obligation of nationalization.”³³ Evidently, the inauguration speech raised awareness in Brazil since the country imported most of its natural gas from Bolivia, and the state-owned Petrobrás was the leading company in the Bolivian hydrocarbons market.

A few months after the Bolivian inauguration, the relationship between Bolivia and Brazil changed drastically. In March, the Bolivian minister of hydrocarbons, Andrés Solíz Rada, declared that Brazil treated Bolivia as a “semi-colony,”³⁴ and then in April, the Brazilian private company EBX was expelled from Bolivia, increasing tensions between the two countries.³⁵ Meanwhile, as domestic pressures on Morales rose, negotiations between the government of Bolivia and Petrobrás began to deteriorate.³⁶ With an eye on upcoming elections, the Bolivian government issued the

²⁸ On the different approaches to the region among the Brazilian elite, see [Spektor 2010](#), 36–38.

²⁹ This can be seen both in the rhetoric and actions of the Brazilian government, such as leading the creation of institutions like, MERCOSUR, UNASUR, and the South American Defense Council and providing financing for the integration of the region’s infrastructure (via IIRSA and the national development bank BNDES). See [Pinheiro and Gaio 2014](#), 9–23.

³⁰ This can be seen during political debates in the Senate, in which policies associated with the paymaster role, such as the provision of financing for neighbor countries, are frequently pointed out as being against the national interest. See [Virgílio 2006a](#), [2006b](#), and [Agripino 2006a](#) and [2006c](#).

³¹ Bolivia had a very important relationship with Brazil in the energy sector. Bolivia supplied most of the gas consumed by the Brazilian industrial sector, and the Brazilian state oil company Petrobrás had been responsible for over 20% of Bolivian foreign direct investment between 1995 and 2006. Petrobrás, however, paid only 18% of royalties and taxes in production of natural gas, enabling the company to have a very high profit margin in the neighboring country. For comparison, by the end of 2006, 82% of the value of production was destined to the Bolivian State, while private companies retained only 18% ([Cardoso 2007](#), 120; [Bolivia 2006](#), art. 4, I).

³² In the case of Bolivia, in an interview in 2006, the president of Petrobrás, José Sérgio Gabrielli, mentioned that, in 2004, Brazil had even requested a revision of the gas prices, aiming for a reduction in the amount paid to the Bolivian government. See [Roda Viva 2007](#). Furthermore, [Fuser \(2007\)](#) shows that Petrobras’s initial planning with Bolivia was defined solely by economic interests, only loosely related to regional integration.

³³ See [Brazil 2006c](#). A good assessment of Bolivia’s passive revolution promoted by Evo Morales can be found in [Webber 2016](#).

³⁴ See [Folha de São Paulo 2006a](#).

³⁵ See [Estado de São Paulo 2006a](#).

³⁶ See [United States 2006b](#).

nationalization decree on May 1, 2006; Morales claimed the role of national developer³⁷ to the Bolivian state and said that Brazil was acting like an “Imperial State.”³⁸

The Bolivian nationalization was filled with two symbolic aspects. First, the decree was issued on May 1, Labor Day, and named “Heroes of Chaco,” a reference to the 1930s war with Paraguay, and second, the discourses and, most importantly, the military occupation of the refineries created a powerful image for the Bolivian president, showing political strength both domestically and internationally.³⁹ On repeated occasions, the Bolivian president declared that “Bolivia needed partners, not bosses or colonizers,”⁴⁰ and as mentioned before, Minister Solíz Rada fiercely criticized Petrobrás, associating it with Brazilian geopolitical interests.⁴¹ On the day of the nationalization, Morales’s party’s (MAS) newspaper, “*El Juguete Rabioso*,” featured a series of articles on Brazilian and Petrobrás subimperialism.⁴²

On the following day, the main Brazilian newspapers showed pictures of the military occupation on the front page, demanding vigorous reaction by the government (Cardoso 2010, 113). Surprisingly, Brasília issued a bland statement, declaring that Bolivia had the right to nationalize its resources and those nationalizations should be respected. President Lula da Silva even recognized the Bolivian right to raise prices and that Bolivia “needed help, not arrogance” (Cardoso 2010, 108).

With Brazil’s regional role conception under dispute domestically, this stance was strongly criticized by the local press, portraying the government as “weak” towards leftist governments in the region.⁴³ The opposition parties, which were prone to defend a role conception that envisaged South America as a market for Brazilian companies, started to use the crisis for domestic political purposes, condemning the government for incurring “excessive costs” with regional integration⁴⁴ and its foreign policy for being “ideological” and not serving “Brazil’s real interests” (Cardoso 2010, 113) while allowing Bolivia to nationalize Petrobrás’ assets.⁴⁵

Even inside the Brazilian government, the conciliatory tone of the first days was not unanimous (Cardoso 2010, 108–26). While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs defended conciliation with La Paz, the Ministry of Mines and Energy, as well as Petrobrás, positioned themselves against such a tone. The company’s CEO, José Sérgio Gabrielli, declared that Petrobrás would freeze investments in Bolivia and that “unilateral measures, made in an unfriendly way, force Brazil to react.”

After initially acknowledging Bolivia’s right to nationalize its hydrocarbons, Brazil called Bolivia, Venezuela, and Argentina for an emergency summit to discuss the

³⁷ Morales 2006, 16–26. Also see Morales’s declarations on the Bolivian state’s role in Roda Viva 2006.

³⁸ See Folha de São Paulo 2006e.

³⁹ The Bolivian government mobilized its troops to guarantee the nationalization and take control over the country’s oil fields. The president made the announcement beside army troops and government ministers in front of Petrobrás installations in the San Alberto field. This “military occupation” was justified as an attempt to avoid sabotage and to protect company installations from radical activists but was most likely an attempt to boost support for Morales in the military (Fuser 2011).

⁴⁰ See Morales 2006, Roda Viva 2006, United States 2006a.

⁴¹ See Página 12 2006b, Folha de São Paulo 2006e.

⁴² See Folha de São Paulo 2006e.

⁴³ See Amorim 2006f; Cardoso 2010, 113.

⁴⁴ This is in line with Brummer and Thies (2015), who propose that opposition parties will attempt to substitute or modify a government enunciated NRC to make it more in line with their own. See, for an illustrative example, Senator Álvaro Dias’s discourse on July 7, in which he declared: “If there is interrupted Brazilian projects (. . .) the Brazilian government is excessively generous and provides financing for construction work and projects (in Bolivia).” As a comment to the discourse, Senator Marcos Guerra, also from the opposition, regretted the fact that the government chose to loan money to “neighbor countries that are practically stealing Brazilian assets instead of increasing retirement payments or helping small businesses.” See Dias 2006.

⁴⁵ The opposition parties quickly incorporated these critiques to the general opposition discourse towards the government. Thus, the “ideological foreign policy” critique was associated with a general discourse on party use of the state apparatus. The fact that the administration was taken by surprise by the nationalization decree was explored as a sign of Lula’s incompetence and unpreparedness to govern. See Dias 2006; Agripino 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; and Virgílio 2006a. On opposition discourses in the first Lula administration, see Goldstein 2012.

issue, revealing a preoccupation with the regional audience's reaction to the altercasting.⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that Venezuela, considered at the time Brazil's biggest competitor for regional leadership,⁴⁷ was suspected of acting behind the scenes in favor of Bolivia.⁴⁸ Indeed, one day before the summit, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez had visited La Paz and declared his full support for Morales,⁴⁹ later offering technical support for YPFB (the Bolivian state hydrocarbons company) from its state-owned oil company PDVSA.⁵⁰ Chávez also explored the gas crisis in order to advance his own energy integration proposal—a mega gas pipeline.⁵¹ Thus, the Bolivian altercasting was perceived by Venezuela as an opportunity to influence the Brazilian role and the design of the South American community.

The nationalization took Brazilian authorities by surprise, placing them in a dilemma.⁵² On one side, a harsh and direct response would confirm Brazil's position as an imperial state, a label that evidently would undermine Brazil's aspirations as "regional leader" in South America or "representative of the developing countries" among the world stage. On the other side, a passive acceptance of nationalization would mean increasing concrete economic costs of regional leadership, something inconsistent with the idea of the region merely as a market, as well as appearing soft-handed to a domestic audience in an electoral year (Hage 2006, 194–95). This corresponds to what the role-learning literature terms a "problematic situation," in which role conflicts or complexity induce role change (Harnisch 2012, 53).

As the altercasting continued, the crisis started to draw regional attention. The minister of foreign affairs, Celso Amorim, gave a series of interviews to Latin American newspapers, addressing the issue of small powers' criticism of Brazilian regional leadership.⁵³ In interviews given to the Bolivian newspapers *La Prensa* and *El Deber* during his visit to La Paz, the minister acknowledged the existence of asymmetry problems between Brazil and smaller countries—although he clearly separated the Bolivian issue from Uruguayans and Paraguayans' complaints about MERCOSUR.⁵⁴ Stating that Brazil understood the existence of feelings of exploitation, he claimed that Brazil "cannot feel guilty for something it has not done," underlining the fact that Brazil was slowly creating a domestic culture that recognized the need to address these problems in a positive way.⁵⁵

Amorim argued in the same manner to the Argentinean newspaper *Clarín*, claiming there were "objective reasons for frustration" and proposing a "new deal" to

⁴⁶ See Brazil 2006a.

⁴⁷ For Brazilian competition with Venezuela, see Burges 2007, Flandes and Wojczewski 2010.

⁴⁸ See United States 2006c, *Página 12* 2006a. The presence of Venezuela itself, the only country that was not directly involved in the issue—Argentinean company Repsol-YPF had also been nationalized—was interpreted by some as a proof of this involvement or as an acknowledgment of Venezuelan achievement of leader status in the region. See Agripino 2006b, *Folha de São Paulo* 2006b.

⁴⁹ Chávez's support for Morales went as far as issuing a diplomatic note attributing the declaration that Morales was influenced by Chávez in the nationalization process to "the ignorance of our Brazilian friends" and characterizing declarations by Brazilian Minister Celso Amorim communicating Lula's discomfort with Venezuela's role in the episode as "disrespectful," associating them with "provocations made by the reactionary media against the Bolivian president." See Virgílio 2006c; *Folha de São Paulo* 2006c.

⁵⁰ Cepik and Carra 2006, 8–11. See also *Página 12* 2006a.

⁵¹ Chávez project of the GASUR, a 15,000 km gas pipeline for South America connecting Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay aimed at creating a new model of integration in South and Latin America under Venezuelan leadership. The proposal was reportedly not viewed favorably by Brazil due to Venezuela's role in the Bolivian hydrocarbons nationalization and to restrictions on Petrobrás participation for being partially private-sector-owned. See United States 2006e, 2006f; *Petroleos de Venezuela S.A.* 2006a, 2006b and 2006c.

⁵² Wehner and Thies (2014) describe "dilemmas" as situations in which the traditions can no longer explain a chain of events, which may cause dissonance or role inconsistency and, therefore, induce change.

⁵³ See Amorim 2006d, 2006e, and 2006g.

⁵⁴ See Amorim 2006d, 2006e.

⁵⁵ See Amorim 2006d.

develop industrial policy mechanisms, financing, and more flexibility in rules for smaller countries in the region.⁵⁶ These statements showed that Brazil was rejecting being labeled as an imperial state and reaffirming its role as a peaceful leader who recognized problems of smaller countries. Amorim went as far as asking the smaller countries to “have patience with us,”⁵⁷ which suggests a process of negotiation and mutual accommodation for the incorporation of small powers’ expectations in Brazil’s role-remaking process.⁵⁸

The Brazilian government also had immediate concerns about its own domestic audience. After the summit, in a series of interviews with Brazilian newspapers, Amorim justified the government approach by alluding to the Brazilian diplomatic and peaceful tradition; a harsher approach, he argued, was incompatible with Brazilian diplomatic style, and recognition of the Bolivian right to nationalization was a logical conclusion of the principles that guide Brazil’s own foreign policy.⁵⁹ The interviews emphasized notions such as “national interest,” reassuring the business sector that there would be no interruption in gas supply, and denying comments on Bolivian accusations of imperialism. The framing of the issue intended to avoid the opposition’s criticism of an “ideological foreign policy.” As Amorim put it, “it is not a question of being “the good guy.” This is important for us [having good relations with Bolivia].”⁶⁰

In the meantime, Bolivia continued its multiple framing strategies. This time aimed at international audiences during a European Union summit, only one day after a joint statement by Brazilian and Bolivian ministers confirming the negotiations of new contracts, Morales said that Petrobrás had illegal operations and that Brazil had “bought the state of Acre from Bolivia for a horse,” declaring later that his “statements were distorted” when confronted by Brazilian officials.⁶¹ Conversely, when interviewed by the Brazilian media, Bolivian officials said that “Brazil is the bigger brother of the Bolivian people” and “Maybe the problem is the company [Petrobrás] and not the government.”⁶²

Just after Morales’ declarations at European Union summit, Amorim gave a long interview to the Brazilian center-left magazine *Carta Capital*. In this interview, the “national interest” argument loses momentum, being replaced by clarifications about the Brazilian role conception, now closer to a de facto regional paymaster.⁶³ The Bolivian recent critiques were acknowledged as legitimate, and a sense of responsibility towards small countries begins to appear, with Amorim even saying “we should do more for the smaller countries.” Regional integration is presented as inevitable, with the Brazilian future being tied to its neighbor’s success.⁶⁴

It is interesting to note that, even Petrobrás, the actor that would most likely be against any accommodation toward Bolivia, since it would be the one that would bear extra costs, was divided on how to deal with La Paz. There was an internal group supporting the paymaster role, arguing that Brasília should understand Bolivian government’s rights by considering their claims to enhanced participation in the gas production as legitimate and fair. Contrarily, another group leaned towards

⁵⁶ See Amorim 2006g.

⁵⁷ See Amorim 2006d.

⁵⁸ This suggests a change in two of the dimensions proposed by Hamisch (2012) to understand role remaking. The incorporation of the community’s expectations indicates a change from an Ego-dominated to an Alter-oriented role conceptualization. The fact that these expectations refer, mostly, to those of Bolivia reveals a shift in the addresses of Brazil’s role-taking behavior, expanding its scope to small powers.

⁵⁹ See Amorim 2006a, 2006b.

⁶⁰ See Amorim 2006a.

⁶¹ See Folha de São Paulo 2006d, Estado de São Paulo 2006b.

⁶² See Roda Viva 2006.

⁶³ This can be understood as an attempt by the government to propose a new “narrative,” in the sense used by Wehner and Thies (2014), as a response to the “dilemma” it faced.

⁶⁴ See Amorim 2006c.

a more aggressive leadership role, defending the idea that Petrobrás should secure its gains in Bolivia, arguing that contracts should not be renegotiated and that the company's business interests should be defended at all costs (Cardoso 2010, 171).

Although Brazil had articulated its public discourse as a benevolent leader, the country started to take a harder stance in negotiations behind closed doors.⁶⁵ During the week of May 22, Celso Amorim visited Bolivia in an effort to improve bilateral relations. Amorim censored Morales on the use of troops, commenting that “countries mobilize troops against enemies, not friends” and made it clear he was not going to meet the Bolivian hydrocarbons minister, Solíz Rada, a strong critic of Brazil. Moreover, Bolivian attempts to seek financial aid and political support in the *coca* issue were promptly rejected by Brazil. According to a secret cable from the United States, “Amorim told the Bolivians that Brazil wanted to cooperate but that the Bolivian government should be careful about what it does and says,”⁶⁶ reminding Bolivia of Brazil's position as chair of IDB's debt forgiveness program. In a joint declaration at the end of the visit, Bolivian support for Brazilian aspirations in the UNSC was reinforced.⁶⁷

This harder stance apparently weakened the more radical positions within the Bolivian government. For the following months, negotiations seemed to have been successful for Brazil, occurring mostly at technical levels between Petrobrás and Bolivia. They apparently reached impasses, and the Bolivian government faced internal difficulties with the nationalization process after the Senate censored the hydrocarbons minister. This suggests the Morales administration was not only facing problems in effectively implementing the nationalization, but also in controlling Congress. While the government defended the minister, calling his censoring “anti-patriotic,” the dispute with Brazil seemed to have weakened Solíz Rada's radical position. In anticipation of the censure, it was Vice President García Linera who was sent to discuss gas prices with Lula, not Solíz Rada, who had been responsible for previous negotiations with Brazil.⁶⁸

The situation changed in mid-September, when the Bolivian Hydrocarbons Ministry issued a resolution that unilaterally gave YPF monopoly over the exportation of gas and oil. Under the argument that Petrobrás had extraordinary profits, some of its assets and two refineries were confiscated without compensation. The Bolivian attempt did not take into account the Brazilian electoral calendar, angering the Brazilian government and pushing it into a different direction. Due to closing elections, domestic disputes over Brazil's regional role conceptions and the perception of Brazil as an important and respected country acquired more relevance. Consequently, the Brazilian reaction was harsher—President Lula said “the Brazilian patience had ended,” and there were threats of economic retaliations (Cardoso 2010, 109).

The Bolivian government immediately changed its policy, suspending the resolution and weakening Minister Solíz Rada, with Vice President García Linera taking control of the negotiations. Three days after issuing the resolution, Solíz Rada resigned, a fact seen as positive by the Brazilian government.⁶⁹ In spite of the firmer reaction aimed at the domestic audience, Brazil reaffirmed its commitment to help Bolivia a few days after the threats,⁷⁰ with president Lula declaring at a

⁶⁵ See United States 2006d.

⁶⁶ See United States 2006b.

⁶⁷ See Brazil 2006b.

⁶⁸ See United States 2006g.

⁶⁹ See United States 2006h.

⁷⁰ One could say that elections temporarily altered the self-composition dimension of the role, enhancing its Ego part and weakening its Alter part. However, as the Brazilian governments' subsequent actions indicate, the shift towards a more Alter-oriented role conceptualization seems to persist.

MERCOSUR meeting that “we must be aware that we have to help Bolivia, we have to work in joint projects, we have to work for development.”⁷¹

The effective paymaster role was also reaffirmed to the domestic audience, being actively defended by Lula in a presidential campaign debate. When the opposition candidate raised the government’s reaction to the Bolivian nationalization, Lula declared that, knowing the troubles faced by the Bolivian people, Brazil had to be fair in negotiations. The Brazilian role as a regional leader and paymaster was clearly stated, with Lula accusing the opposition candidate of “possibly not knowing that we have a responsibility towards Bolivia, towards Uruguay and towards Paraguay in helping these countries’ economies to develop.”⁷²

The negotiations were resumed in a different tone, and on November 3, a new contract was signed between Petrobrás and the Bolivian state company YPFB.⁷³ In February 2007, with great pressure from the Brazilian Executive, Petrobrás changed the formula that set the price paid for the Bolivian gas, increasing it up to 4 percent per year, showing Brazil’s disposition to pay more for regional integration.⁷⁴ In spite of this disposition, a few months later the Bolivian government issued a new unilateral decree, establishing YPFB as the only hydrocarbons exporter in Bolivia, with direct consequences to Petrobrás’ financial flow, since the production of its two refineries could not be exported anymore. The Bolivian government offered US\$60 million as compensation, while Petrobrás asked for US\$200 million. This time, however, negotiation went on without complications, with an agreement being reached after four days of US\$112 million, a loss for the Brazilian company.⁷⁵ The question was not much politicized either, with the Brazilian government’s reactions being restricted to a short note, expressing discontentment with the new decree.⁷⁶ The lack of politicization indicates a reduction in domestic role contestation, suggesting the paymaster role had been stabilized as the new master role.

Conclusions

In this article we argued that altercasting used by small powers is able to promote role conflicts within the leader’s role repertoire and eventually replace the initial master role for an auxiliary one more benign to the small power. However, altercasting only becomes effective when interacting with regional pressures conducted by secondary powers, as well as by domestic opposition that perceives the leader’s original role as negative and unfair. The result of such strategic alignments is a regional community more similar to the aspirations of the contestant, considering that changing the leader’s master role ultimately affects how the community of values and norms are designed and enforced.

More generally, we propose a performative mechanism that incorporates altercasting, domestic opposition, and regional contestation concepts to explain master role transition of a regional leader. This mechanism refines the literature on master roles by transcending the structural understanding of master roles as status positions and considers master role changes solely on performative aspects promoted by a handful of actors interactively.

However, the threefold mechanism proposed shows only sufficient causes for master role changes. We do not claim that altercasting, or any other condition, is necessary for role-conflict and, consequently, master role changes. Only further studies of

⁷¹ See [Brazil 2007b](#), 60.

⁷² See [Bandeirantes TV Interview 2006](#).

⁷³ See [United States 2006i](#).

⁷⁴ See [United States 2007a](#), [2007b](#); [Cardoso 2010](#), 121.

⁷⁵ Petrobrás had paid \$100 million for the purchase of the refineries and invested \$30 million to improve their production ([Cardoso 2010](#), 110).

⁷⁶ See [Brazil 2007a](#).

similar and dissimilar cases could yield more evidence toward a possible necessary condition for change and other combinations of sufficient conditions. In sum, our model is an eclectic conglomerate of smaller mechanisms instrumentally crafted to give out a minimally sufficient explanation for a particular outcome derived from a theoretical contradiction in master role enactments—master role transitions without changes in the material structure.

In addition, the literature on regional leadership and regional powers is too focused on hegemon capabilities and secondary powers contestation but not on how small powers react to regional imbalances and how they can interact with other regional neighbors and domestic groups simultaneously. Our study shows that this is not the whole picture of the regional powerhood discussion and that small powers should be included from a contestant point of view, with the ability, if not the capacity, to influence regional interactions according to their interests and perceptions.

Finally, reversing the concept of socialization to analyze how small powers influence regional interactions gives an interesting contribution to socialization debates. As we argued, in traditional socialization schemes, the socialized actor—normally a novice state—is changed more profoundly after entering the community, while the community—or its leader—is only slightly modified. From our perspective, socialization is accomplished not just by adjustment to social pressures but also by the leader's role-learning process after small-power altercasting. Since regional communities represent the projected values and norms of their leaders, changing the leader's role means altering the community itself. In sum, socialization can become an effective bottom-up concept if connected to role learning assumptions.

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