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To cite this article: Leslie E. Wehner (2020): Chile's soft misplaced regional identity, Cambridge Review of International Affairs, DOI: [10.1080/09557571.2020.1752148](https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1752148)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1752148>



Published online: 12 Jun 2020.



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Chile's soft misplaced regional identity

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Abstract *This article analyses Chile's foreign policy, utilizing a multilayered identity model, one that covers the country's most stable identity layer as a sovereign state, an intermediate layer in which processes of identification between Chile and its peers unfold, as well as the most superficial layer in which key entrepreneurs advance new identities. Chile's identity is examined through the lens of role theory, in order to unpack this country's sense of being a misplaced state in South America. Chile's role behaviour as a soft case of misplacement is triggered at the most superficial layer and partly permeates the intermediate layer of identity, despite the country's historical experiences which have given rise to a sense of uniqueness in South America. Thus, this article shows how Chile's role-play has tended to increase and/or offset its sense of misplacedness in South America in the period starting from 1990 and continuing into the new century.*

Introduction

Chile demonstrates role-based behaviour that oscillates between amplifying and reducing its sense of being a misplaced state in its region, namely because of its global trade aspirations in the period from the 1990s–2010s. Chile's global trader role was promoted internationally by its foreign policy elite at the expense of a stronger South American vocation and commitment to regional integration. Chile's role-play also clashed with the expectations of those regional states that anticipated it showing more commitment to South American regional integration schemes. Others' expectations—especially those of Brazil and Argentina—were that Chile should join the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR, established 1991) as a full member, and from there insert itself into the systemic forces of economic globalization. Instead, Chile adopted a pragmatic approach grounded in its identity as an open economy, one which did not compromise its economic sovereignty and still showed commitment to its region. This approach was however not seen by the country's peers as full commitment to regional integration and the South American region (cf. Oyarzún 2013).

Chile, however, is not a hard case of misplaced identity. Instead, it is a rather moderate one, as the country's sense of not belonging to its region will not persist in the long term nor does it manifest strongly in its behaviour in the international realm, despite it having historical experiences that have fuelled feelings of uniqueness vis-à-vis its neighbouring countries. It is a contested narrative advanced by role entrepreneurs or the foreign policy elite, one

The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of this article whose comments and suggestions were valuable in strengthening the main arguments.

that concerns prioritizing the international by downplaying (but not totally erasing) the regional dimension (see Aslam et al 2020). Moreover, its role behaviour—which in different periods increases or decreases its sense of cognitive dissonance—is what makes Chile a soft case vis-à-vis other actors who experience severe regional dissonance like Israel, whose mere existence as a state is at stake regionally (see Aslam et al 2020, 10).

Thus, this article analyses Chile's 'soft' misplaced identity in South America. While the sense of being a misplaced regional actor may be a continuous and contested narrative at home, the focus of this article is exclusively on when this misplacedness manifests in Chile's foreign policy. In other words, it is shown how this process of Chilean misplacement in South America takes form specifically through the role conceptions underpinning its external actions, as roles are the behavioural manifestations of identity (Wehner and Thies 2014). The article therefore addresses the following core research question: How does Chile increase or offset its perceived sense of distance from its regional setting via its foreign policy?

The main claim made is that Chile is far from being such a hard case of misplacement as Israel, or a well-placed regional state like Brazil (see Aslam et al 2020). Chile's constant role behaviour of pursuing internationalism usually mismatches with the role demands of other key regional actors such as Brazil and neighbouring countries. Chile's sense of distance from its region sometimes even triggers actions from role entrepreneurs that ameliorate its cognitive dissonance from the regional order and the expectations of others. Thus, this piece assumes that the Self (Chile) sometimes pays more attention to the demands of global systemic cues and extra-regional actors, behaviour that increases its regional misplacedness. Furthermore, when its dissonance tends to constrain Chile's regional interests, the country seeks ways to offset its sense of misplacedness vis-à-vis the demands of regional actors. Chile's free trade agenda—without and external to South American regional integration schemes—gave strong priority to the United States, Europe and Asia during the 1990s, and tended to augment this sense of misplacedness in its foreign policy, consequently also impacting Chile's foreign policy in the new century. What undermines Chile's sense of belonging to South America is the country's economic and foreign policy elites' recurrent emphasis on its competitive advantage as an economic role model, and the idea that it has 'a nice house in a bad neighbourhood'.¹

However, Chile has also used a proactive regional security agenda under the auspices of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, established 2008) and the launching of shallow regional institutions (Pacific Alliance, PA, created 2012; PROSUR of 2019) to show more of a South American vocation. This has been done in order to reduce the impact of its sense of being a regional misplaced state. It is the presidents and ministers of foreign affairs

¹ Since October 2019, social mobilizations have been taking place in Chile which have impacted on the international image of the country. President Sebastián Piñera (2018–present) had to cancel or move two international summits scheduled to be held in the country: namely, those of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and of the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP25. Whether such mobilizations will bring substantial changes to the socio-economic model, and whether or not they will intensify Chile's narrative of being a unique country and misplaced regional state, cannot be assessed at this point. Thus, these mobilizations and their effects on Chilean foreign policy do not form part of this article.

who hold power, and thus assume the position of role entrepreneurs. These government figures play these roles on behalf of Chile, and consciously or not, augment or ameliorate this cognitive sense of regional dissonance or soft regional misplacedness.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows: First, it introduces a theoretical and conceptual framework based on the interplay of identity and roles. Second, brief context to Chile's international actorness is presented, in which the country's more traditional roles prior to the 1990s are examined. Third, Chile's misplacedness and role-based behaviour in the period from the 1990s–2010s is analysed. Finally, the article concludes by connecting the theoretical piece of this special issue with the Chilean case.

Misplaced state identity and roles²

A misplaced state is an actor that experiences a certain degree of cognitive dissonance, be this moderate or strong, between its geographic location and its sense of place. This dissonance manifests in a mismatch between a state's national aspirations and the way that other states recognize it. The dissonance takes form in role and counter-role interactions between a Self and Other. Moreover, a soft or moderate sense of misplacedness is associated with the aspiration of the Self in which the actor experiences cognitive regional dissonance but has limited capacity to distance itself from that region.

A soft case like Chile, therefore, may engage in certain types of actions to ameliorate such regional dissonance through a variety of mechanisms. For instance, foreign policy elites may create a new regional institution, seek to redefine what constitutes the region, or engage in initiatives across a variety of issue-areas to signal their growing self-identification with another region elsewhere. Or, a misplaced state may seek extra-regional alliances to compensate for its lack of regional partnerships, existing on the basis of its sense of misplacedness, and expressions of it by regional peers. Moreover, a misplaced state can also use its misplacement strategically to achieve certain economic or political gains somewhere else beyond its 'natural' region. Whatever strategy a soft misplaced state pursues, its core actions (including also its regional ones) are designed to compensate for a lack of regional presence, influence and acceptance of its identification (see Aslam et al 2020, 6–9).

Thus, Chile's misplacement can be analytically captured by the 'three layers' model of identity, advanced by Hagstrom and Gustafsson (2015; see also, Aslam et al 2020, 12–19). The deepest layer reflects the most stable identity of an actor, as it covers the core essence of what Chile is, such as its sovereign state role and independent state role. The intermediate layer is where role conceptions are adjusted more substantially, as the Self and the Other negotiate and re-negotiate their role understandings and how they should be played in a given context. New roles can also be incorporated into this layer to ensure stability in the role repertoire of an actor; like, for example, Chile's rival and/

² This section provides a brief overview of the theoretical framework concerning the phenomenon of misplaced statehood. For a comprehensive exposition of the phenomenon, see Aslam et al (2020) in this issue.

or amity role with Argentina, its South American role, its global free trader role and its open 'regionalist' role.

The incorporation of new roles into Chile's repertoire and the initial reinterpretation of existing roles, however, start first at the less institutionalized and most superficial third layer, where role entrepreneurs (leaders and foreign policy makers) advance their own role conceptions and understandings in the face of the expectations of Others. However new attempts at casting roles for a state can also show the power limitations of role entrepreneurs and herald their eventual failure due to domestic role contestation (Cantir and Kaarbo 2012) as well as the rejection by Significant Others of the role of the Self (Wehner and Thies 2014). Thus, the misplacement of Chile in South America started at this third layer of identity, which can permeate the intermediate layer, making a role a stable part of the role set of an actor. However, this is only if entrepreneurs are successful in advancing and promoting a new role or new interpretations of a dormant role at that superficial layer.

A preference for roles over identity is based on the fact that the latter lacks action as part of its conceptual properties. Roles possess not only the identity aspects that form part of an actor's being, but also the behavioural dispositions that they face in interactions with others within a specific and context-based setting (Wehner and Thies 2014; McCourt 2014). In this sense, the model of Hagstrom and Gustafsson (2015) was adjusted to include the role dimension, as the role set or number of roles that an actor possesses (Aggestam 2006) is a good proxy for the overall identity of a given actor (Thies and Nieman 2017). Thus, the multilayered identity model serves the purpose of helping us observe the role-location process, or how a Self and Other negotiate the meaning and appropriate patterns of behaviour attached to role and counter-role interactions (Aslam et al 2020; see also, Thies 2012).

Moreover, the misplaced identity is constructed in a Self and Other interaction, bringing together the aspects of national identity and the interplay of regional and international expectations coming from both Significant and General Others.³ A General Other is the expression of a social system wherein actors follow systemic cues to locate a role that is appropriate to a given situation. Social actors have the ability to put themselves in the shoes of the Other (role-taking) and find an appropriate role by following those systemic cues. A Significant Other, meanwhile, is a direct socialising agent for the Self, one who is not chosen randomly. A Significant Other is based on the past historical experiences of the Self with a neighbour, friend, rival, colonial power or

³ The concept of 'misplaced state' is preferred over the one of 'cusp state' here. Misplaced states offer more analytical purchase and leeway than the one of cusp states does. The study on the latter is conceptual, however, it lacks theorization. Misplaced state is also preferred over cusp state as this special issue focuses more on processes of identity-building and on identification, whereas cusp is a category for states that are strategic in their location. For example, pivotal states are likely to be cusp ones. Thus, a cusp state is a self-cast process and an analytical category thought of in strategic terms, given the essential aspect in the conceptual properties of such states: the strategic location of a state in a region and/or between regions. Instead, a misplaced state does not need to be a country that has a strategic location or an actor that seeks to or seems to be a bridge between two regions or more. In fact, despite Chile's claims and self-narrative of intending to bridge and be the gateway to Asia Pacific in South America, the results of this self-proclaimed role have not been successful, as countries from the Atlantic region have not acknowledged this or systematically used Chile to 'go' to Asia. On cusp states, see Robins (2014).

hegemon that will help it to define its own role(s) within a specific interaction with a Significant Other (see Harnisch 2011).

Not all Significant Others have the same relevance in the ability of the Self to create and improvise its own roles. The Self sometimes pays more attention to certain Significant Others over different ones. For instance, Chile may be keener on listening to the US than to Brazil, or to Argentina over the US or to Bolivia over Peru. It is through these sometimes contradictory sets of expectations—existing between systemic cues (regional and international systems) and Significant Others—that an actor like Chile needs to navigate in order to even conceive and play its roles. As this process of role location—wherein roles and counter-roles are negotiated—is never as neat as expected, then some states experience dissonance. This is true when both cognitive and geopolitical processes (in its region) create a sense of not belonging; when expectations from regional Significant Others do not match those of extra-regional Significant Others, or do not match the forms of systemic cues.

In this sense, the empirical analysis suggests that Chile's misplacedness emerged when the country started to downplay its South American role from the second half of the 1990s. Chile's logic was to promote and begin to locate the free trader and open regionalist roles, which created distance from other neighbouring states at the regional level. While these roles created distance from regional peers, they also generated acceptance from Significant Others outside the South American region, meaning the US, as the global hegemon. Regional peers expected something different from Chile, specifically regarding what a regionalist South American role meant. Thus, Chile's case is a matter of diverging expectations between the Ego (Self) and Other (Alter)—in this case, regional others.

The location wherein these diverging expectations between Chile and regional Others arise is the regional order of South America. As regions are open, porous and nested in other notions of 'region-ness' (Katzenstein 2005; Prys 2010), Chile experiences its role locations within such different notions of regions as the Southern Cone, South America and Latin America. While South America has been a regional notion advanced particularly by Brazil as part of its quest to attain global powerhood (see Spektor 2010; Bethell 2010), the idea of South America has nevertheless still been part of the identity of most states belonging to this socially constructed region. It is present in the overlapping ideas and ideals of regions in which Latin America has been more salient than South America. However, in Chile's role actions as free trader and open regionalist, the idea of adjusting or not to South American regional schemes has been a key part of its foreign regional policy. Thus, the role dissonance that Chile experiences unfolds in the South American region as an open entity, one in which the country moves from South to Latin America when it helps her to reduce the pressures from South American peers (see Wehner 2015).

Before proceeding to the empirical analysis of the Chilean case, a brief note on methodological considerations and caveats seems appropriate. This article relies on an interpretive narrative analysis approach to Chile's narrations regarding its role actions seeking to ameliorate and/or augment the sense of it being a misplaced regional state. Such interpretive narrative analysis fits well with recent methodological discussions, advances and theorizations in symbolic-interactionist role theory (see Wehner 2018). Furthermore, while the

subsequent empirical analysis concentrates more on Chile's role-based actions, this does not mean that expectations from General and Significant Others are simply overlooked. When pertinent they are described and examined explicitly. However, such expectations from Others are part of Chile's role-play, as states are social actors able to consider, and thus act in response to, the role demands of Others. Thus, when Chile plays a given role, it does so, following not only its own foreign policy goals, but also as a response to the expectations of other actors, be they regional or extra-regional ones. When states play a given role internationally, it is because they have already taken into consideration the demands of the Other, and thus this is already reflected in the role-play process of that actor. In other words, Chile's narrations and role-playing already address such expectations. The need for explicit assessments of, and references to, the expectations of Others in the process of role conception and role-play hence decreases.⁴

Chile's misplaced identity in South America

Context

Chile's misplaced regional identity matches up with expectations from great powers and like-minded countries external to the Latin American/South American region. These actors have reinforced Chile's identity differentiation from the rest of the region. Chile has a narrative of being a unique country which, at the same time, also underpins its role of global free trader. The winning of the Nitrate War against Peru and Bolivia (1879–1883) cultivated Chile's positive self-image as a unique nation state in Latin America (see Collier 2003; Larrain 2001; 2005; McEvoy 2011). This episode has typically been manipulated and embellished by political elites to fuel a narrative of uniqueness.

Although this sense of uniqueness has always been present throughout Chile's history, it permeated and became more active and salient in the country's foreign policy after it achieved a wave of free trade agreements (FTAs). This FTA policy also helped Chile to consolidate its strong economic reputation and image, based on a solid economic and political system, in the 1990s–2010s (Prieto Larrain 2011, 275–288). The social construction of the country's export-oriented economy started under the authoritarian government of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990). It was in this period that Chile would leave behind its roles as a third-world and developing country—and the narratives associated with them that were salient in the 1960s and early 1970s—in order to now prioritise a new economic model.

Under Pinochet's rule, Chile was sporadically involved in certain external affairs for security reasons. These included the border conflict with Argentina (1978), and coordination activities with other authoritarian governments in the region so as to control and punish dissidents (namely, the Condor Plan formulated along with Brazil and Argentina). At the same time, Chile had an enmity role relationship with Bolivia and Peru (Wilhelmy and Durán 2003). In this

⁴ For an analysis of the importance of role expectations for role conceptions, and how to conduct research on this dimension of role theory research within foreign policy analysis, see Wehner (2015) and Elgström (2007).

period Chile was able to establish some other relationships, for example with China, in which a series of bilateral and pragmatically driven cooperation initiatives featured (see Gachúz 2012, 134). However, China was then still not the relevant player and great power that it is today in the international system.

This relationship with China did not protect Chile from being severely criticized for its authoritarian nature and human rights record by Western countries including the US. As anecdotic as it might sound, the fact that Pinochet's trip to the Philippines was aborted due to the pressure exerted by the US on the government of Ferdinand Marcos (1965–1986) while the Chilean president was already flying over the Pacific Ocean not only constituted a massive foreign policy fiasco for the latter but also reflected Chile's isolated role in the international system (Muñoz 1980, 24–25; Fermandois 2005, 416–417). Thus, the expectations of the US and European countries made Chile enact an isolated state role globally (1973–1990). Further, Chile lacked a varied and multifaceted role set beyond sovereign state, Latin American state and rival to its neighbours, even despite the aforementioned sporadic interactions with other states like China. Most of Chile's roles in this period were those from the deepest layer of identity as it could not achieve new ones, given it lacked an active social life within the international system (see Thies 2013).

Chile's global trader and open regionalist roles

With the return to democracy, Chile began to conceive of, and play, new roles so as to expand its social life and reintegrate itself into the international system. For instance, Chile started to cast new role relationships with most of its neighbours. It cast a new relationship of amity with Argentina, while neither Peru nor Bolivia accepted this proposed role of friendship (Fermandois 2011). The new role relationship with Argentina was a political decision advanced by the respective presidents Patricio Aylwin (1990–1994) and Carlos Menem (1989–1999). These two role entrepreneurs were key to advancing this relationship (Fuentes 2009, 127). This change of role went along with the development of mutual-trust measures in the security sector, as well as with a pattern of increasing economic interdependence between the two countries (Lorenzini 2013). Chile also started to be proactive in multilateral institutions, and became a key promoter and advocator of human rights norms (Fuentes-Julio 2020; Wehner 2016).

However, Chile's most fundamental roles since the 1990s have been conceived of as part of its foreign economic policy. Chile decided to advance a global free trader role, as it was in line with its model of export-promotion first implemented under authoritarian rule. Chile first started to negotiate limited-scope trade accords with Latin American states, only to then jump into a spiral of ambitious FTA negotiations from 1997 (see Porras 2003; Oyarzún 2013; Dubé 2019). Chile's main aspiration was to negotiate FTAs with its main trading partners such as the US, the European Union and Japan (Fuentes 2006). President Eduardo Frei (1994–2000) was a driving force behind establishing the pillars of FTA policy, which was followed up on, without significant changes being made, by President Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006) and subsequently Michelle Bachelet (2006–2010, 2014–2018) and then Piñera (2010–2014, 2018–present).

An FTA with the US was seen as a strategic step towards a closer political relationship between the two countries (Van Klaveren 2011). Chile started to conceive the role of partner for the US in South America. This new role relationship was reciprocated by the US after that country showed interest in Chile becoming a member of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), established in 1994. After Chile's potential NAFTA membership was met with resistance from US Congress, the two states then started several rounds of talks over a bilateral FTA instead (Fernandois 2005, 526–527; 2011, 41–45). The FTA with the US was only signed in 2005 (Wehner 2015).

Moreover, international financial institutions—along with the American government—started to herald Chile as the 'good student' of the South American region in terms of its fiscal responsibility, economic model of development and external trade policy (Silva 2008, 165). This external attribution of respect enhanced Chile's perception that its place was on the world stage, and not in risking its economic sovereignty in regional integration schemes such as MERCOSUR (Fernandois 2011, 39). The latter was created by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, while also representing a joint leadership venture between Argentina and Brazil (Malamud 2011). Brazil, as the regional power, also expected Chile to become a full member of this regional group, while simultaneously starting to show concern for Chile's distant relationship with the rest of the region (Mullins 2006, 123).

Another fundamentally new role for Chile's foreign economic policy was the open regionalist role, which was achieved with zeal by Frei and deepened further by all subsequent presidents thereafter.⁵ This role took form from Chile's desire to still cooperate with South America, specifically by agreeing to be an associate but not a full member of MERCOSUR (Wehner and Thies 2014; Wehner 2016). While this role of open regionalist coexists with and supports that of global free trader, according to Chile's role conception, it did not fulfil the expectations of significant regional others such as Argentina and especially Brazil. However, by retaining its independence from regional groups, Chile distanced itself from MERCOSUR and from Brazil—as a regional power expecting Chile's followership (see Monge 2013). For Chile, this meant that it could prioritise partnership with the US in the region and continue increasing its number of FTAs with the big economic powers of the world beyond South America (Fuentes 2006).

The US as Significant Other and global market conditions as the General Other were the relevant expectations that Chile followed in locating its roles of global free trader and open regionalist state. These roles were contested by the audience of regional peer states. These new roles for Chile amplified the country's sense of regional misplacedness, as South American contestation of its foreign policy only increased. Chile's new roles and sense of uniqueness were also reinforced by the positive external attributions coming from the International Monetary Fund as well as the US, who depicted Chile as a role

⁵ Other South American actors have also subscribed to the premise of open regionalism, however not necessarily playing the role of open regionalist as actively as Chile has done. Certain roles within an actor's role set are active while others lie dormant (see Thies 2010). Instead, other countries in the region would adopt full membership status in certain regional groups (Andean Community and MERCOSUR) at the expense of bilateral trade deals, while Chile would prioritise its economic bilateral agenda of ambitious FTAs negotiated with states situated beyond its region.

model in a region that was characterized by recurrent economic crises (see Silva 2008, 176–177). Chile started to match up with extra-regional expectations, and to enhance the impression of it being a different country as it became a model of how to negotiate FTAs. This image of being economically successful, in part generated domestically and with its origins lying in an authoritarian context, was then used by the new democratic governments to highlight this sense of uniqueness vis-à-vis the rest of the states that had started to adopt neoliberal reforms only in the 1990s (see Prieto Larraín 2011, 189–193).

For instance, then president Lagos in his speech to National Congress in 2005, highlighted the story of Chile's unique economic success vis-à-vis the meagre achievements of the rest of the region, despite him also mentioning in his report that the country's foreign policy starts from within Latin America. In his speech, then President Lagos, said: 'In 2004, Chile received the lowest country financial risk rate in all its history, and it enjoys of course the lowest country financial risk rate among all our Latin American brothers' (Lagos 2005, 3). Later in the same speech he added: 'Chile is today the most competitive economy in Latin America, and it is the country with the lowest corruption, the country that has the most efficient public service, and the country that leads when it comes to human development indicators in Latin America' (ibid.: 3).⁶

In Chile's narrative, it was ahead of its regional peers, as it had by now years of experience with regards to neoliberal economic policies (Van der Ree 2010, 215–218). Thus, as Chile was presented as a role model by extra-regional actors, the other states of the South American region started to see Chile's commitment to regional integration as distant at best, if not her behaviour vis-à-vis integration as that of total neglect. While Chile showed its own distancing from full membership of MERCOSUR, it simultaneously unfolded a strategy to become part of extra-regional forums such as APEC (1994), in order to find further new FTA partners in Asia (Wehner and Thies 2014). The corollary of this strategic narrative of differentiation vis-à-vis the region of South America was Chile's entrance into the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2010. Chile was, then, the first South American state to become part of the world of developed economies, and exploited such episodes to bolster its narrative of being a unique country in South America (see OECD 2010).

Chile's historical rivalry roles in the present time

There are also historical rivalries that have affected Chile's sense of belonging to South America, especially since the turn of the last century onwards. These rivalries were amplified by the country's branding as a neoliberal nation within South America (Van der Ree 2010). As mentioned earlier, the winning of the Nitrate War against Bolivia and Peru meant the consolidation in Chile of a nation state underpinned by a nationalistic discourse (Arellano 2016). Victory increased Chile's sense of being an exceptional country in South

⁶ Author's own translation.

America. The winning of the war further compounded the previous notion of Chile being an actor that had achieved early political stability (*orden portaliano*) (Jocelyn-Holt 1998) at a time when most countries of the region were experiencing anarchy and division while led by different local *caudillos* after their independence from the Spanish crown (see Lynch 1992). These episodes would be foundational to the consolidation of the Chilean state, and thus vital parts of its national identity as a unique country. Political elites also drew on the belief in the cultural superiority of Chileans, especially of the white elites in power, creating prejudices and a sense of superiority vis-à-vis the rest of the region (Collier 2003; McEvoy 2011).⁷ These historical experiences would underpin and amplify the new narrations of the so-called Chilean success in the era of global economics (see Silva 2008, 163–177). These experiences have created distance and dissonance from the country's geopolitical region, as Chile continues to conceive of itself as a unique country (Larraín 2001; 2005).

However, at the same time, the outcome of the Nitrate War also initially created an enmity role relationship. This has since evolved into a long-term rival role relationship with both of these neighbouring countries, especially Bolivia (Van der Ree 2010; see also, Wendt 1999). For the latter, the loss of direct access to the sea has become a national trauma, while Chile's abuses perpetrated during the war would become part of Peruvian collective memory. These rivalry roles have shaped respective bilateral foreign policies ever since (Arellano 2016). Bolivian claims regarding access to the sea, which gained greater prominence under the presidency of Evo Morales (2006–2019), would receive sympathetic support from the left-oriented leaders taking power in the region in the early years of the new century. This was, indeed, something that Bolivia used to make its case for having access to the sea (see Ministerio Relaciones Exteriores Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia 2015). In fact, then Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez once said that 'he would love to swim one day on a Bolivian beach', while Brazil under Lula da Silva (2003–2010) and Argentina under the Kirchners (2003–2015) offered to mediate between Bolivia and Chile on this issue. The latter, meanwhile, has always argued that the former's demand is a bilateral not a regional issue (Wehner 2011).

The support shown for Bolivia's claims from other governments in South America during the tenure of Lagos made Chile aware that its rhetoric of economic success, and reluctance to join regional schemes, were ultimately detrimental to its strategic interests in the region. Thus, as Chile deepened its national identity as a misplaced state in South America, it also had the strategic ability to offset such a narrative and redirect it, so as to subsequently include a higher degree of regional commitment therein. The misplacedness of Chile was not only a self-cast narrative, advanced by its own foreign policy makers, but it was also externally attributed via the role demands coming from Brazil as regional power, as well as from regional peers, so that Chile could indeed show a South American vocation. Moreover, the recurrent claims of Bolivia regarding access to the sea, and the sympathies shown by left-

⁷ Internally, this sense of cultural prejudice is a rather contested process, especially for those on the left of the Chilean political spectrum, while most salient among those on the right (see Silva 2008). On domestic role contestation, and how the narratives containing roles are challenged by societal and institutional forces, see Cantir and Kaarbo (2012) as well as Wehner and Thies (2014).

oriented presidents in South America, came as a shock to Chile's leaders. Yet the role expectations of others were also internalized within Chile's notion of being a misfit in its region. Something had to be done to alleviate the effects of such a misplaced identity, as regions are cognitive constructs (Adler 1997).

Correcting Chile's misplacement: Back to the region?

During the first presidency of Bachelet, she tried to downplay Chile's notion of being a misplaced state in South America. Bachelet attempted to demonstrate a high degree of regional commitment. Although Chile was initially reluctant about the idea of a new regional organization such as UNASUR (see Flisfisch 2011, 127), it became a member hereof as this regional cooperation group was conceived of as prioritizing a social agenda, health-governance issues as well as traditional political and security matters. In other words, UNASUR did not include economic and trade based cooperation in its functions, which would have hampered Chile's economic sovereignty. While the multiplicity of issue-areas to be covered beyond traditional commercial ones indicate a new form of regional integration called 'post-hegemonic regionalism' (Riggirozzi and Tussie 2012; see also, Petersen and Schulz 2018), for Chile the main contribution of UNASUR membership was to be in the defence and security dimensions.⁸

In fact, UNASUR offered the opportunity to bring in the country's expertise in bilateral security cooperation with Argentina, with the hope that through this platform better dialogue could be established with Bolivia and Peru alike. One of the aims of Chile was to use the UNASUR's South American Defense Council (CDS) as a means of building mutual trust with these two countries. The UNASUR move brought some gains to Chile, as the country began to be perceived as being not too far away from the rest of the region. In other words, this security cooperative agenda of Chile within UNASUR and its CDS helped it to offset its narrative of being a misplaced state in South America and to show a strong regional vocation. At the same time, UNASUR was a non-binding regional platform for Chile (Nolte and Wehner 2013; 2015). UNASUR did not affect the latter's global free trader role, and furthermore allowed Bachelet to use her entrepreneurial skill set to reconnect with the rest of South America. Bachelet played a key role as *pro tempore* president of UNASUR in solving a governance crisis in Bolivia in 2008 (Nolte and Wehner 2013). Thus, this process of reconnecting with a passive or dormant South American role for Chile started to take form at the most superficial layer of identity. From there, it started to permeate the second, intermediate layer of identity in which the government tried to nestle it and thus make it part of Chile's overall role set in the long run (see Hagstrom and Gustafsson 2015).

When Piñera, a centre-right leader, first came to power, the narrative of economic success once again gained the upper hand at the national level. Chile, along with latecomers to the recent wave of FTAs such as Colombia and Peru as well as Mexico, created a new regional scheme whose core characteristic is its trade-based rationale—that is, the earlier-mentioned PA. This scheme focuses on developing common joint ventures to maximize members' economic

⁸ Chile would advance bilateral security cooperative arrangements with Argentina and Brazil from the 1990s. However, it did not succeed in establishing similar policies with Bolivia and Peru.

gains in Asia, with it having an especially China-centred orientation. The PA was met with distance and scepticism by Brazil as the regional power, and also by the rest of MERCOSUR's members (Nolte and Wehner 2014). The PA created costs for Chile (at least this was the perception within the Piñera government), as then Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016) never travelled to Chile on a bilateral official state visit during her time in government. Instead she attended the CELAC-EU summit in January 2013, which she had to leave early due to a tragic event in a Brazilian discotheque where many young people died.

Rousseff eventually came to Chile (for a third time) upon Bachelet assuming the presidency for a second term. Chile's foreign policy makers interpreted their country under Piñera as having a distant relationship with Brazil, as this was the first time since the return to democracy in Chile that a Brazilian leader would not undertake a bilateral state visit there. Chile's leading role in the PA was seen as the specific cause of Brazil's distancing from the Piñera government (Fernandois 2016, 85–87). Brazil's expectations were that UNASUR and MERCOSUR were the core pillars of regional cooperation, and thus anticipated Chile showing its regional vocation through these groups and not through a new one that hampered Brazil's own regional leadership quest (Wehner 2016).

During the second presidency of Bachelet, Chile enacted the role of bridge-builder between the PA and MERCOSUR with the purpose of reducing the country's sense of being a misplaced state in South America. The role entrepreneur behind this initiative was Minister of Foreign Affairs Heraldo Muñoz. He referred to the PA and MERCOSUR as being complementary in nature. Muñoz also went further, highlighting Chile's regional commitment and stating that the country's foreign policy starts from within its South American neighbourhood (*La Tercera* 2014a). In addition, Muñoz proposed having regular ministerial meetings between both regional schemes to exchange information and eventually find deeper ways to complement each other (*La Tercera* 2014b).

All these developments reflect Chile's perceived importance of reducing the tension between it being a misplaced state and a South American one. These developments also demonstrate Chile's strategy to reduce the burden of what was seen by its PA peers as committing to the region. However, these initiatives were conversely viewed by powerful regional states such as Argentina and Brazil as Chile choosing the wrong forum. Thus, Chile experienced the constant dilemma of feeling like—and being—a misplaced state. Its foreign policy leaned, on the one hand, towards economic internationalism beyond the region from the 1990s. On the other, it initiated regional policies mainly on security issues, and then through regional formations that would help reduce its distance from regional peers, and, indeed, address their ongoing scepticism and criticism.

During the second presidency of Piñera, Chile has been able to deepen the gradual convergence between PA and MERCOSUR members, and especially Chile's with Brazil and Argentina. The shift to right-wing governments in South America—such as those of Mauricio Macri (2015–2019) in Argentina, and Michel Temer (2016–2018) followed by Jair Bolsonaro (2019–present) in Brazil—as well as their overall ideological stance being one in support of free trade policies, have made cooperation possible between these two regional groups (*Expansion, en Alianza con CNN* 2018). Thus, it seems to be the case that

Chile has continued to play this role of bridge-builder between both groups as a way to reduce its own regional identity of misplacedness.

Despite Chile's actions taken to show a greater South American vocation, these actions still tend to clash with the domestic view and narration of economic and political elites regarding the country being different to the rest of the region. This undermines Chile's regional identity and furthers its sense of cognitive dissonance from the rest. It was Piñera himself who, despite the above-mentioned initiatives to reduce this sense of misplacedness, would refer to Chile as different to, and better than, the rest of the neighbourhood a day before social mobilizations began in the country in 2019:

Look at Latin America [...], Argentina and Paraguay are in recession, Mexico and Brazil in stagnation, Peru and Ecuador in deep political crisis and in this context, Chile looks like an oasis because we have stable democracy, the economy is growing, we are creating jobs, we are improving salaries and we are keeping macroeconomic balance[...]. Is it easy? No, it's not. But it's worth fighting for (Piñera, interview in *Financial Times* 2019).

Nevertheless, the political configuration of a South America that was leaning towards the right when Piñera took power for a second term, allowed Chile to minimize the sense of it being—and to contain the external regional attribution of it being—a misplaced state within its own region. In fact, Chile exerted a leading role in the launching of a new regional institution after UNASUR stalled and eventually disintegrated. This new international institution, PROSUR, has become a political and diplomatic forum reflective of Piñera's stance on regional cooperation, as the body keeps cooperation at a very superficial level without an underlying concrete developmental and institutional plan.

Yet the recent coming to power of the centre-left Alberto Fernández (2019–present), and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as president and vice president respectively in Argentina, will put pressure on the functionality and survival of PROSUR, and on the recent direction and thrust of MERCOSUR too, making regional cooperation among their members more difficult and fragmented going forwards. These political developments may augment Chile's sense of being a misplaced state if its new project PROSUR is repeatedly questioned and ultimately dismantled by peers, and if the bridges built between the PA and MERCOSUR collapse.

Conclusion

This article has assessed and evaluated Chile's identity in foreign policy matters through the use of the multilayered model of identity-making and change, proposed by Hagstrom and Gustafsson (2015). It has also adopted the conceptual repertoire of role theory to show how Chile sometimes increases and/or offsets this process of it being a misplaced state in the cognitive region of South America. It has also shown how Chile acts and reacts to its self-constructed and externally attributed sense of being a misplaced state in the same region.

In the analysis of the Chilean case, it is possible to observe that the country's sense of misplacedness takes form through the views of foreign policy

and economic elites, and their emphasis on the country being a role economic model in South America—something that has also been externally attributed by global financial actors, and by the US as global hegemon. The narration and notion of it being an actor that has ‘a nice house in a bad neighbourhood’ has permeated and shaped Chile’s foreign policy vis-à-vis its regional peers. This story of economic success has also merged with the historical experiences informing Chile’s sense of uniqueness in its region.

Chile’s misplacedness started to influence its foreign policy specifically in the period from the 1990s onwards, despite it having more long-term historical experiences that already cultivated its sense of uniqueness and exceptionalism as a nation. It is also possible to observe Chile’s soft misplaced identity first unfolding at the most superficial layer of identity. Here, foreign policy elites enjoy the possibility of being able to respond to role demands from systemic cues or general others that tend to augment the perceived distance from the cognitive region of South America. They are also able to take measures to reduce the gap between the diverging views of Chile’s own understanding on the one side, and the expectations of regional peer states on the other.

Chile’s role interactions at the most superficial layer of identity, however, also permeate the intermediate one thereof, and thus the role conceptions of free trader, open regionalist and South American state. Chile has constantly offered alternative solutions to the expectations of regional peers. Yet these have sometimes been received with scepticism by the audience of South American states, which creates tensions and dissonance in Chile’s role set as a global free trader and open regionalist actor vis-à-vis its less active South American role. Thus, Chile is a soft case of a misplaced regional identity.

Funding

This work was supported by the University of Bath’s Internationalization Funding.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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