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The Front and the Line: The Paradox of South American Frontiers Applied to the Bolivian Case

LAETITIA PERRIER BRUSLÉ
Pole de Recherche pour l'Organisation et la Diffusion de l'Information Géographique, University of Paris, Paris, France

Dialectics between pioneer fronts and legal frontiers are not specific to South America. However, the coexistence of these two realities appears to be more problematic in this continent than elsewhere. In this article, the continent's double geopolitical heritage (a result of its 'discovery') is analysed in order to explain the permanent state of tensions between these fronts and frontiers; these tensions help to decipher the ongoing territorial dynamics in the countries of the continent. Using the example of Bolivia, the goal is to demonstrate that the specific Latin American territorial link between a society and its national territory is produced by the permanence and coincidence of American fronts and European frontiers. Both contribute equally to establishing a state and to building a nation upon its territory; however, they are antinomic (one is mobile, the other stable). The resolution of these dialectics is conjured up by integrating these two realities into a common symbolic territory, conferring on them the same power to semanticise space. Freezing boundaries, however, risks compromising the continent's integration process (and the opening of its borders), a goal to which all states aspire in the meantime.

INTRODUCTION

'I discovered infinite lands',[1] wrote Christopher Columbus in 1502, back from his third trip, where he had reached for the first time the 'solid grounds' of the South American continent. He described these lands using

Address correspondence to Laetitia Perrier Bruslé, 9 rue Paul Lelong, 75002 Paris, France. E-mail: laeti.perrierbrusle@free.fr

superlatives such as immense, wild, paradise-like, and hellish, but more particularly, he used the word *infinitissimas*. However, a lexical defeat is present in that his hyperbole could not conquer the foreign nature of these lands, which were far too American for Europeans to describe and understand. This separation – between the lands to be discovered and those who discovered them – expressed in its whirling immensity, defined their temptation of non-limits. La Condamine, Humboldt, and Fawcett, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, also used these figures of speech belonging to the first conquistadors. Nevertheless, it was alarming when their settlements continued to reduce this infinite space. With the Spaniards settling in the Andes and the Portuguese longtime attachment to the Pacific coast, the middle of the continent was left as a stretch of infinite land filled with geographic mysteries; the confluences of the Orénoque, the hydrographic borders of the Amazon and Paraguay, and wonderful countries such as the Eldorado or the Paititi were above all inter-mysteries and those with the most posterity.

The logic within the metamorphoses of these myths is that this infinite space within these inner confines is the key to comprehending South American geography. That its discoverers viewed this infinite space with a complacent attitude illustrated their lack of knowledge of the midlands; by the second half of the twentieth century, their conquest was only partial and the region remained an unknown periphery. Indeed, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century maps of the continent often reduced these inner zones, as when La Sierra de Santa Marta (today part of Columbia) was hedged in by Paraguay.[2] Yet, cartography was unable to erase these unknown confines. 'At the dawn of revolutions giving national independence, Brazil finally revealed itself in all its immensity', affirmed French geographer Elisée Reclus.[3] Furthermore, he spoke of 'the mysterious zone' that separates the Brazilian hills from the Andes counter fronts. Thus, the cartographic scheme could not help the modern states evade the main question: their empty midlands. These regions confronted modern states with geographic uncertainties, the insufficient knowledge of their own natural resources, the vulnerability of men, and their relations with their own central lands. In all, these South American midlands were much too alien to apply the modern structures conceived in Europe.

To compensate, states – first, colonial empires, then, national independent states in the nineteenth century – adopted two strategies. The first was to use the European model to define political borders as a way to restore order in the infinite American lands. The second strategy consisted of opening fronts aimed at conquering the midlands. The first strategy established the European frontier and furthered the discovery of the continent, but the opening of fronts followed quickly, and both strategies accompanied the birth of Latin America. Synchronous, they benefited from a close and complex relationship that was owed to a dual Latin and American

attachment that accentuated these contrasts. In this article, a depiction of the outcomes of these dialectical relations and the fashion in which geographic objects can coexist within antinomic configurations of space is attempted. To this end, the Latin American literature that has, until now, made few attempts to find a link between these objects is reviewed. The case of Bolivia is used to describe the relation between these dialectics and their ways of operating; due to its territorial characteristics, it serves as a paradigmatic example. The rapid pushing forward of fronts – due to a weak state and population pressures – resulted in the construction of a collective ideal character, as legal borders were lost according to the mobility of territorial retrievals. A front that is supposed to be mobile but is incapable of moving against a static border in retreat is enough to contribute to and pose the problem of frontline dialects cherished in South America.

THE DIALECTS OF THE LINE AND THE FRONT

Before presenting the specifics of the Bolivian case, the complications that spring from these coexisting types of borders must be stressed, as must the fact that it is the functioning of complex relations between fronts and borders in South America, not in Latin America, that is being examined. These fronts and borders do not include all national frontiers – the focus of this study is the inner continent – and they connect territories that, from several standpoints, are poorly recognised. Moreover, this study does not cover the east–west borders that traversed the territories of the ancient populations.

The terms employed in this article must first be defined. 'Line' corresponds to 'a topological metric limit', a notion used by Jacques Lévy to define a border.[4] Why is the term 'line' preferred to that of 'border'? Because it stresses space and the ability to draw space. Indeed, the universal need for separation answers the need to give meaning to space. Space divided along lines is a sensed space and, thus, transcribed. Since the existence of lines depends on a state's capacity to draw and defend them, these lines correspond to the legal borders of nation-states. 'Front' is derived from military vocabulary and means the point of contact and opposition between two neighbouring states that are at war for the purpose of setting the contours of their national territory. Because a front is the result of pressure from different sides, it is subject to mobility and its only stability lies in the balance of the sides. In France, studies of these mobile fronts have been characterised more by the writings of tropical geographers than by those studying North American situations. Pierre Monbeig shed light on the notion of the progression of fronts in his analysis of Paulistas coffee planters.[5] The military front became the pioneer front, established at the limit of advancing civilisations; although this front remained mobile, it did not encounter neighbouring resistance, but foreign threats.

Of European Borders: The Line

South America was born as a result of the conquest of its lands by pioneers. Searching the mysterious edges of the Western world, these conquerors quickly realised the difficulty of their mission – all was alien on this continent. However, men of power in their homeland reported their advancements and blindly traced a dividing line for the newly conquered world: the Tordesillas meridian (Figure 1). This meridian remains, in the case of South American space, an unforgettable choice in terms of Brazil's Iberian empire

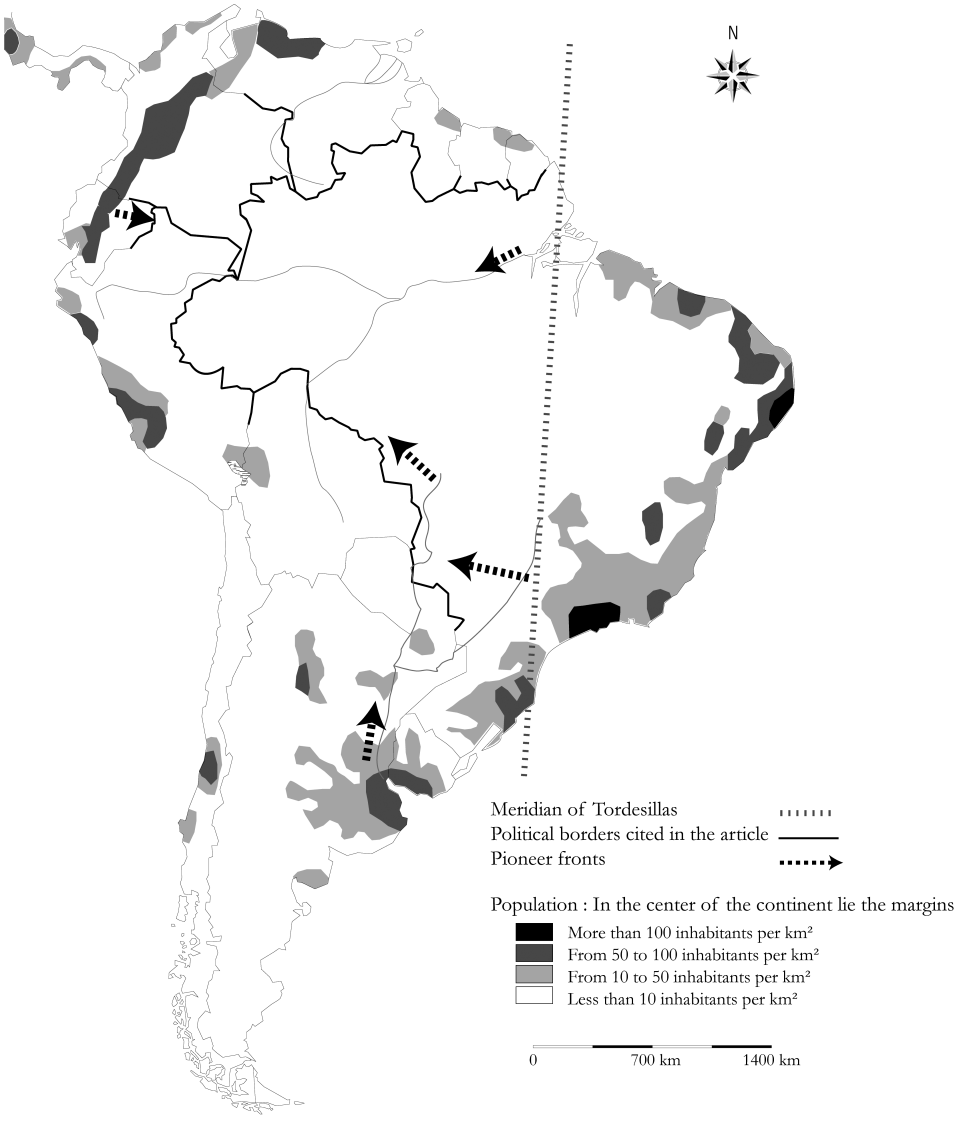

FIGURE 1 Frontiers and fronts in South America.

and its political borders. 'The Tordesillas treaty is the most important element in our diplomatic history'', affirms Helio Vannia in his history of Brazil.[6] Vazquez Machicado, a Bolivian historian, chose to put a map of it on the cover of his book on the limits between Bolvia and Brazil.[7] The Sao Paulo memorial to the *bandeirantes* (gold hunters and Portuguese slaves) includes this line: 'They waved axes and knocked down skittles, folded the Tordesillas line vertically'.[8]

The rivalry between the Iberian powers over South America caught the attention of Pope Borgia Alexander VI in 1493. To settle their growing conflict, he decreed the *Bulles Inter coetera*, by which the region west of the Azores – the road to India discovered by Columbus – was to belong to Spain, which would now be responsible for Christianising India. One year later, the Iberians met in Tordesillas to settle the procedures for dividing up the new world. Geopolitical equilibrium had changed; the Portuguese, based on their desire to counter the rise of Spanish power and their sense of the immensity of the lands to be discovered, agreed to the line being moved 370 *leguas* to the West; in less than one year, the maritime line had become a ground border. This shift gave the Portuguese new rights on the coast of future Brazil. Many things have been said about this line. It created the wrath of the French king François I, who viewed it as illegitimate and in addressing Charles Quint, the commandant of Alcantara in 1542, asked to see the 'Adam's testament' that excluded him from that part of the world. Others denounced it as absurd and unfair, dividing an immense continent, much of it yet to be discovered, for the benefit of Portugal. Brazilian historiography insists that the lines set out in the Tordesillas treaty constitute an unprincipled division of the continent. However, the essence of Tordesillas should not be reduced to the commonplace; its importance lies in its capacity to take symbolic possession of an unoccupied space, already integrated into a new world geopolitical scheme.

Furthermore, this symbolic possession of unoccupied space not only took the place of an impossible conquest but also sublimated it. Thanks to a superimposed and exogenous grid, the meridian gave meaning to space, not for its physical entry into space but for its capacity to re-ordinate the unknown. In all, this border contributed to a general semantisation of American space.[9] These conditions explain why it so easily became the archetype of South American borders and why all central borders of the continent are affiliated to it. The Tordesillas meridian conserved political borders, although subtly. The heavy separation lines drawn on these paper borders were more real than the boundaries drowned by the wild waters of the Amazonian rivers or by luxuriant vegetation. Neither men nor nature can block imprecise lines drawn on maps by those building a country. 'The American continent is perhaps the only region in the world where Europeans had less trouble in cutting, trimming and dividing'.[10]

The export of European concepts into foreign lands is, however, not without consequences. Today's political borders were born in Europe with the advent of modern states responding to their will to set boundaries on the sovereignty of these states. The exercise of their power could no longer be satisfied by the confines of murky affiliations. 'Principles of continuity and territorial cohesion overrode medieval marks'.[11] For Europeans, this modern border crossed the large, diagonal empty space that hovered over the continent, establishing itself in confined areas where men in conflict gave it a frontier-like character, secondary only to its human history before the establishment of South America. The line was not redefined until the eighteenth century, due to sporadic confrontations between religious communities and *bandeirantes*; it was redefined partly by taking into account the human settlements that occupied the central part of the continent – relatively – in allegiance to the Spanish or the Portuguese court. Even at the time of the Madrid Treaty in 1750, there were few people. In 1767, no more than 45,000 Indians lived in Jesuit Reductions in Charcas Audience (the future Bolivia), whereas 'on the rio Negro, the Solimões, on the Madeira or the Guaporé, Lisbon had no more than 30,000 subjects aligned'.[12] In contrast to European borders, the colossal border separating the Portuguese and the Spanish empires remained an abstract reality. With so few men in the area, speaking different languages, carrying different flags and communicating with different centres, the border was invisible.

A military front did not create this line, and thus it profited from the eighteenth-century notion of a 'good border', which led to the death of centuries of obscure seizures of lands by popes and kings. Now was the time for natural borders, traced by the rivers (Iteñez/Guaporé), and for rational borders, leaning on geodetic path lines (cartography was spreading its wings).[13] It was also a time when borders were adapted to national myths, thanks to their relative abstraction; in each country, territories were inserted into a national semiosphere. In Brazil, the western border naturally became the 'Brazil Island' border because of its association with ancient Spanish possessions. Rivers were then sought to give the eastern front an aquatic dimension.

Thus, the strength of South American political borders as ideal independent borders of the future is a result of past history and a capacity for abstraction.

Of American Borders: The Fronts

Shortly after the Tordesillas meridian was defined in 1494, the conquest was set in motion. It, however, entailed an additional category within the geographic objective, a derivative of the border concept. Whereas the objective of reducing the unknown empty space of the centre remained, the modalities were different. The pioneer front joined the political European front in

order to conquer the South American continent communally, an interface between a civilisation advancing in an ecumenical conquest and the world the settlers believed to be uncivilised. 'Front' means a mobile boundary. Typically, border theorists define a front as a contact line between two powers that are face to face (the term derives from the front of a face). Through confrontations, a military front crystallises into a political front. On the South American continent, the front had advanced within a space that was considered empty and, thus, mobile to a greater extent. Resistance met before the front was minor compared to that found behind it, where there were complications caused by the necessity of upholding ties amongst pioneers and Indians or the Atlantic population. Another complication was that the American front did not create a political front, which nevertheless was set as a prelude to the conquest of the continent. Thus, the front must be seen as a uniquely American invention, a pragmatic answer to the need to dominate the heart of the continent.

During the discovery of both North and South America, the same causes were to produce the same effects with the arrival of a foreign population: the opening of a conquering pioneer front. For the most part, the occupation of space in South America took a similar course to the occupation of space in North America; one small difference was that the mysterious zone was situated to the West in North America and in the centre of South America (pressed tighter and tighter by Spanish colonisation in the Andes and Portuguese colonisation on the Atlantic). However, these local variations do not matter much. Turner's[14] frontier, its meaning formalised as a concept, remains one of the most pertinent geographic devices for deciphering North/South human geography in America. Turner's frontier applies to the movement of territorial appropriation that began in the sixteenth century, a constantly expanding movement and a milestone to the advent of civilisation over the barbarians. Seen from Europe, the unique, outstanding trait of Turner's frontier is its capacity to move ahead, a trait that made it more original than European borders. In the South American case, however, mobility was not its most important characteristic because, before being a mobile front, Turner's frontier was the brilliant border, the one separating civilisation from the barbarians.

For this border to move ahead, it had to do so on even ground or what was thought to be solid ground. The conquest movement was accompanied by a redefinition of the centre lands. Once known as eternal, they became *virgin* areas in the minds of settlers, the adjective used most frequently by discoverers when speaking of the central regions of South America. This recurrence (up until today) is not innocuous. The virginity of the centre is linked to the notion of the border; because it had not been reached by men, it remained neat, pure, intact, and empty. Turner characterised the North American West as a 'huge page.' (The image of the palimpsest,[15] used in Europe to record the profundity of the history of man-made landscapes, is

irrelevant here.) In America, lands to be settled were *tabula rasa*, blank pages, but to transcribe what? History, of course, with the entry of marginal lands into national and then global space, since the passage from wilderness to civilisation marks the beginning of the detailed account of our Western epoch. In this crucial moment, 'land without history lights the way to the course of universal history'.[16] This redefinition of central lands reveals that the stakes in this opening of borders on this mobile front are not only the creation of riches but also the natural movement of settlers ready to conquer new lands. Referring to them as empty, virgin or blank gives them meaning. Naming them, and giving them a category of geographic credibility, integrates them into the spatial order. The supposed virginity of such an environment is directly linked to the projects of conquest that it must sustain in order to integrate the central lands into national space.

The passage from the notion of the unknown to one of virginity is therefore fundamental. Indeed, certain geographic mysteries take time to disappear (expeditions of adventurers still search Paititi today). However, there is no doubt that the *tabula rasa* notion accompanied the semantisation movement to take possession of the American space.

The Coexistence of Both Realities

The coexistence of these two geographic realities – 'front' and 'frontier' – is not unique to South America. However, these two realities exist in greater contrast in South America than in other regions of the world due to the coexistence of diametrically opposing practices of space: the American conquest, realised in the mobile front, and the Latin political ordering of space, expressed in abstract legal borders. These two lasting realities reveal themselves along their principle lines of opposition.

First, there is an ontological divergence within their natures. The American front, whose essence resides in perpetual forward movement, should postulate an absence of limits; indeed, it has caused some people to comment that 'the American border has no boundary'.[17] The American border is not a line but a social project. In both North and South America, the spirit of the border is present; John F. Kennedy was not the first to invoke it with his "New Frontier". Thus, the progress of the border in other parts of the continent may have a similar intention. The Medici government (1969–1974) in Brazil spoke of giving 'lands without men to men without lands', as a political and social program. The conquests of the West and East, depending on one's viewpoint, magnified pioneer lands, communalising the potential of their unexploited good. It was mystical in that it had no limits (unless imperious), just as the Pacific Ocean was for North America the only limit capable of stopping the pioneer will. In contrast, the European border was conceived as the extreme border, beyond which there was nothing. Under the colonial empires, central lands were savage, a representation used by

nation-states to turn their national border into barriers to ensure their survival and to build a nation. However, with independence, this representation posed a grave problem for the new states: how to advance the nation beyond an identity elaborated with references that were far from the national reality (such as the case of Latin tongues or certain indigenous languages, like Quechua and the Aymara). In the quest for national references, territory is the rare common denominator that unites a people, although for this territory to become the basis of a nation, it must be indestructible and barren. If so, its borders will become the ramparts for the crystallisation of the 'metal fusion of the nation'.[18] As seen in Bolivia after territorial cutbacks or in Brazil in the fight against the internationalisation of the Amazon, holding a border can become a state social project.

Whether representing a supreme limit or an absence of limits, the American front and the political border have a divergent relationship with the notion of limits. Still, the front and the border are similar in one aspect: They contribute to social projects, either pioneer conquest or nation building.

The opposition between front and border also finds a spatial expression. If a border carries delicate marks on a map, this is how it starts to exist; the American front, however, was quite thick, a confined area where civilised traits faded little by little and mixed in with those of the barbarians. The stereotypes of the conquest of the North American West established, in collective imaginations, the notion of the border region as a triptych, marked by local autonomy (in response to the dilution of power by a centripetal effect), violent confrontation (due to the supposed influence of barbarians) and possible rapid enrichment (a variation of the South American *topos* of the Eldorado). The spatial dimension of the front/border opposition was not only due to their morphologies; their positions also differed. The conquest front was placed well below the political border that was established further along the central areas. Between the front that set the limit to the areas controlled by society and the borders (thus, a legal state limit), there sprung a 'solution of continuity'. External border, internal border: The goal was to have them match.[19] This dialectic was a state obsession. The front must move forward to join the external border, which should be stable, but that external border could move back if the front did not reach it (following the first century of states gaining independence, border amendments were legion). This 'in-between' area, by semantic sliding, took on the status of 'border region'; social project, future region, it crystallised all national dreams, and on its blank pages, the future of the country was inscribed (the best one).

There are numerous contradictions between the border line, handed down from a European concept of borders, and fronts, born from the meeting of pioneers and wilderness. The permanent state of these two geographic realities explains the outcome of South American national

space. For a long time, an eschatological vision prevailed when looking at national destiny. Following a conflict-filled territorial history, according to this vision, the front would join the border and erase the contradiction. However, this left little space for their ontological opposition: the first being a living form, its essence found in permanent movement; the second, a stable form designed to bring order to the world. If this never occurred (even Brazil was unable to have its pioneer fronts reach its external borders), a contemporary continental dynamic – one of regional integration – could resolve this ancient contradiction. Corridors of integration would conquer the centre of the continent and mark the edge of the border (as was seen in North America with transcontinental railways). They would help to declare not only the end of the American border but also the end of the European border designed as a closed barrier. The dissolution of these two objects could resolve the issue of their difficult coexistence. However, this is far from the case. Integration plans conceived by the IIRSA (Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America), CAN (Andean Community of Nations), or MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market) demand that states abandon two historic territorial determinants: one that turns them into an exporting enclave, surrounded by others' territories; the other, established under military rule, that has made sanctuaries out of national territories.

THE BOLIVIAN DIALECTIC

In the second part of this article, the functioning of the front's dialectic – the border with Bolivia and, more particularly, its border with eastern Brazil – is explored. Although problems exist in all countries of South America, the territorial characteristics of Bolivia are more crucial and more sensitive than those of the others.

An Uncertain Existence

From the founding of Bolivia (in 1825) to the war of Chaco (1932–1935), its borders have continued to move back: from 2.5 million km^2 at the time of independence to 1.1 million km^2 today. In one century, the country has lost 53% of the territory it claimed at independence (Figure 2). This territorial map of losses is omnipresent in Bolivia, known by all, but one must ask if there is not something rotten about the Altiplano country that fosters such a 'gangrene of extremities'.[20] The map illustrates the injured nature of the Bolivian territory, from which all of its neighbours have taken spoils, and it is difficult to find a country that is not an object of Bolivian territorial resentment. Even Bolivia's dangerous national enemy, Chile (since it stole 'Bolivia's sea') is put into perspective by this map.

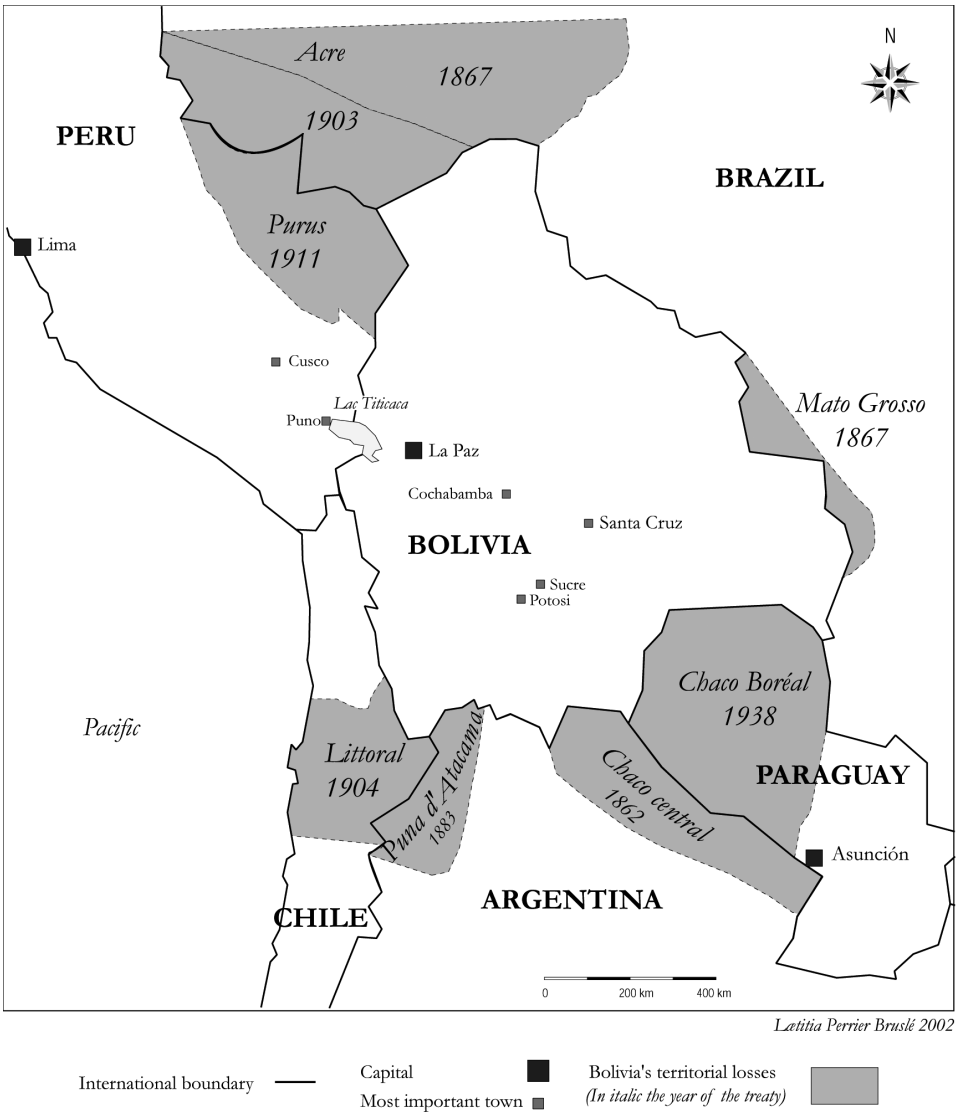

FIGURE 2 Bolivia's diminishing assets.

Territorial history alone does not contribute to Bolivians' worries about the future of their country. There have always been fundamental questions about its very origin. Did Bolivia have reason to exist as an independent entity? Could it form a nation-state? The country that gained independence in 1825 had not been a viceroyalty; rather, it had been organised at the inferior administrative rank of the Charcas Audience. Like the Audience of Quito that gave birth to Ecuador, the Audience of Charcas could not give birth to a country. Liberator Simon Bolivar believed: 'Upper Peru was an immediate dependency to Plata's viceroyalty, as Quito was for Santa Fe.

[Neither] Quito nor Charcas can legitimately be independent'.[21] Only social agitation and the interests of the local oligarchy can explain Bolivia's creation. For a country whose only argument for survival is its creation, its founder's disavowal is not harmless and seals the absurdness of its destiny. 'Bolivia is the best and craziest example of the bursting of old Spanish colonies. A State is created in 1825 whose being is not justified and carries the name of the one who will look in vain to unify the South-American continent'.[22]

Thus, if a country's viability depends on the capacity of the state to occupy its unoccupied space, with such territorial losses, Bolivia's position in the world and the more crucial issue of its legitimacy are questioned. To seeing the vulnerability of a territory threatened by its neighbours is added the pain of its disappearance. All Bolivian geopolitical writers, either civilian or military, have the same goal: to prove Bolivia's legitimacy. Paradoxically, their praise-filled assertions only reveal the measure of their fear for their country rather than a reassurance of its future. 'Bolivia is not only viable, it is necessary'.[23] Proposals for the 'polonization of the country' (dividing it among its neighbours) will 'never put the Bolivian spirit to an end'.[24] Other authors have emphasised that it is a miracle that Bolivia has not disappeared. 'And over all, Bolivia rode [it] out', said Jaime Mendoza in 1925. Half a century later, Gumucio Dagron dwelled upon the good news that 'Bolivia exists', adding that normally it just 'painfully perseveres in its beingness'.[25]

In the quest for reasons why this country exists, the absolute argument of territory is again invoked. When they were founded, South American states presupposed the presence of a nation, with the exception of Bolivia, and even today its status as a nation is questioned. Its emergence as a nation was doubly restrained by excess social, ethnic and regional diversity among the Bolivian people and the homogeneity of the pan-American ensemble. In this context, territory is the only referent capable of forging a national identity that may carry the seeds of a nation. Bolivia's diminishing territorial assets thus become a durable argument for the country. Not only does it represent a common good shared by the Bolivian people but equally it contains (and did so even before its foundation) the so-called essence of Bolivianity. 'Those who invented Bolivia could not be other than the very sons of the country', affirmed Jaime Mendoza,[26] thus demonstrating the intertwined territorial link at the birth of Bolivia between territory and the sons of the land. National historiography will never cease pointing to the functioning of this link, which goes back to Bolivia's origins in the Charcas Audience and the *Tawantinsuyu* (Inca Empire).

Territory nurtures the nation. This paradigm gives borders a particular status because borders shape the territory. This double metonymical process that assimilates the country to its spatial expression, and thus to its boundaries, occurs frequently. In need of graphic representation, it makes

the borders the simplest expression of the nation. 'Atlases have discovered the Nations of the World'.[27] If borders, and claims for their defence, can be a solid element in a nation, they also guarantee – in the present – the nation's lifespan, which is strongly attached to territory in the Bolivian case. And for this, Bolivia's borders need to be closed; they must act as a barrier. Turned outward, they protect against foreign incursions, territorial seizures and the ruining of natural resources. Turned inward, they create conditions for the emergence of the nation.

The attachment of Bolivians to their legal borders, and the value they give to them, can only be understood within this perspective. They must be hermetic and stable, traditionally European in form, as they trace the nation and its borders. Stable, they defend the durability of the nation; hermetic, they provide a hiatus to enable the emergence and establishment of Bolivianity. Both qualities support their capacity to bring order to the chaos that preceded independence in South America. From behind their borders, Bolivians can reconstruct a strictly national vision of the world, with their geopolitical memory of borders remaining alive. The gas war of October 2003 bears witness to such vigour; many Bolivians stormed the streets to protest the idea of open borders and the export of Bolivian gas.[28] Internationalisation, economic integration and open borders are not on the Bolivian agenda.

The Impossible Conquest

Bolivia's legal borders account for its national vision. However, these borders have more of a symbolic intention than a practical one. In reality, Bolivia is an Andean country and its most isolated border areas did not become part of the national territory for a long time. When the Bohan mission arrived in Bolivia in the 1930s to advance a development plan for the country, Marvin Bohan compared the Bolivian situation with his vision of North American borders and stressed the large gap between the inner border that marked the boundary to Bolivianised space and the outer legal border. 'It probably is not exaggerated to say that Bolivia could go on being a *small country*, as is shown by its weak population, if it cannot manage its borders'.[29] He was not the first to have made this observation. The failure of the pioneer front to move forward, even with neighbouring countries' territorial conquests on the outer front, was the most common obsession of all Bolivian governments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

To understand this, it is necessary to recall the geographical dimension of this Andean country: Two-thirds of Bolivia's surface is found in oriental lowlands, less than 1,000 metres in altitude. Nonetheless, it maintains the image of a mountain country. Shut in, it has no coastal face and is unable to develop in the same way as its Andean neighbours. Given its

territorial losses, the country leaves the impression of having retreated into the unassailable mole of its national space: the Altiplano. Indeed, Bolivia has chosen to 'follow the path of altitudes and to swap the blue sky of its celestial sphere against the ocean blue',[30] in response to the absence of a passage to the sea and latent neighbouring threats. As early as the 1920s, Jaime Mendoza had noted this, observing that all that constitutes Bolivia and ensures its continuity is found in the Andes. He developed the *macizo concept*[31]; the Macizo 'is a large central plateau surrounded by two cordilleras that trace a crown, join[ed] to the North and South by mountain knots'.[32] Delineated by these cordilleras, hollow inside and protected on the outside by high mountain peaks, the Macizo is not only a protective fortress but also, as described by Mendoza, a cradle. Its topography recalls, in symbolic order, the Spring of Bolivianity. The two knots, invoked by the two hoops of Mendoza's cradle, are located at the silver mines of Potosi to the south, and the rich countryside of Lac Titicaca to the north. These high places shape the national identity, which has no use for the lowlands. This thesis is the answer to Bolivia's thread of consistency, and it is echoed in its intellectual circles, circulated within its vernacular geography and communicated by its schools and its army. But in choosing the Altiplano as the area of its founding identity, Bolivia has established peripheries, 'lands of aggregation', their sole function to serve as zones of depreciation in the event of invasions.[33] Thus, the Macizo thesis has become a formidable ideological tool, which justifies the eventual abandoning of the oriental region.

National Bolivian space is marked by an 'in between' region of settlement that is between the legal border and the pioneer conquest front and ends at the foot of the Andes. Low population density and inadequate state structures did not allow for a vast movement to conquer under-occupied areas. Unlike other parts of Latin America where pioneer movements were organised by the central state in order to control empty spaces, Bolivia's areas of colonisation were situated at the piedmonts of the Andes, far from the outer border. Even the Bolivian agrarian reform that occurred in 1952 did not include the *tierras baldias*, the virgin lands of the *Oriente*.

The oriental region was, for a long time, located outside the vital core of the country. Although a substantial portion of Bolivian national space, this region had not been of significance throughout the millenniums of history because Bolivia's civilisation had sprung from the Andes (Figure 3). It was only at Bolivia's border dyad (3,400 km) connecting Bolivia and Brazil[34] that it became of consequence. Here, the first South American power met its poorest country, an unequal match and a tragic allegory for Bolivia. This border must be held. Yet the oriental region had been abandoned while its margins and the limit of the frontier were overly committed. How have Bolivians resolved this paradox?

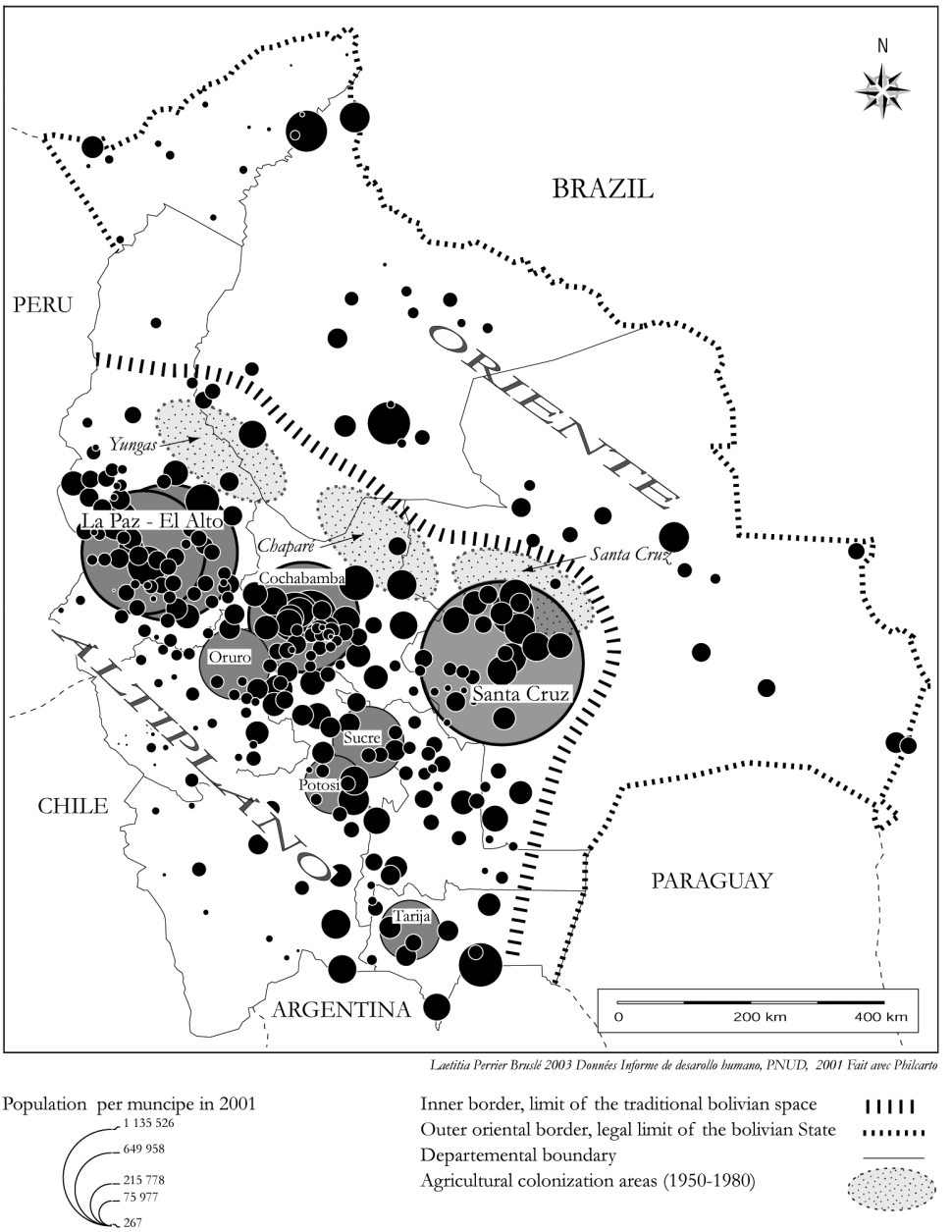

FIGURE 3 Inner borders, outer borders and the in-between *Oriente*.

The country's inability to occupy this area left it with only one alternative: to integrate it into its ideal space. Thus, the frontier zone was established as a waiting zone for an entire population, and under the Ballivian government (1841–1847), it became the centre of the state's attention.[35] Since then, the military has made permanent calls for the

colonisation of these virgin lands. Today, the Supreme Counsel for National Defense publishes alarming reports regarding the oriental border and stresses the need to occupy these areas.[36]

Indeed, arguments for conquering pioneer land and protecting borders are easy enough to find. The oriental region carries all the hopes of Bolivia; it is a place of abundant nature where 'eternal spring'[37] can be enjoyed in the 'promised land'.[38] At the heart of the relationship between mountains and tropical plains, the fascination for this region was ancient and, prior to the foundation of the Bolivian nation, it was expressed in the myth of the Eldorado on the arrival of the Spaniards. However, despite repeated calls for conquest, no pioneer front moved forward into the oriental area. (The occupation of the eastern portion of the area was an attempt to bring some of the territory under state control.) Thus, the settling of the borders of the oriental region became 'a significant element of the collective imagination',[39] without any refiguring of spatial dynamics. The gap between the front and the border, insolvable by the facts, is resolved by the adherence of all Bolivians to an image of the country in conquest, a conquest that is constantly put off until tomorrow. Bolivia's front, which should have been a practical space, has ended up resembling a legal border. Front or border, it is based on this symbolic objective. Guaranteeing the lifespan of the territory with a glorious future, it has become the opium of the Bolivian people.

The Contemporary Dynamics of Frontiers

The concrete process of the appropriation of peripheral frontier leeways is recent. It was not the result of the action of the central state, but rather of a spontaneous inner movement of migration. Traders, coming from the Andes for business, made the pioneer conquests a reality by transforming paper borders into areas of Bolivianised fronts.

These migrations were sparked by communication advances in the area between the border and the Andean nucleus. It was not an easy task to bind this leeway. The heavy investment required to deal with the incompressible physical distance and to build towns almost 1,000 km from the capital was a substantial obstruction for a Bolivian state in continual bankruptcy. For a long time, airplanes were the only way to reach the border regions. In 1998, only 3% of Bolivia's 40,000 km of roads were paved, a trifling number compared to their 1,000,000 km^2 surface. Since then, roads have become a national priority, sustained by financial organisations such as the World Bank, the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank), and the Andean Development Corporation (CAF), and roads to border cities have improved. The road from La Paz to Cobija was improved in 1992, a key date in the city's history. At Guayaramerín, the improvement of the Riberalta-Guayaramerín route (90 km, 2 hours) played a fundamental role in opening

up the town. New highways also meant the arrival of transportation companies, which made the cost of travelling to the border cities from 'inner Bolivia' less expensive.

The population of Cobija increased from 10,000 to 20,820 over the last census period (1992–1999). This doubling was symptomatic of a change on the ladder of migratory phenomena. Before 1992, migrants came by plane from the Andes (principally from La Paz and Oruro) at a heavy price (100 to 120 USD per person); after 1992, land links opened and the trip could be made in two or three days (Figure 4). Time–distance was still a factor and feelings of distance still existed, but the 'money–space' factor had decreased considerably (a land trip cost between 30 and 35 USD). This 7% increase in demographic development was deemed a 'success story', which inhabitants of Cobija compared to the fabulous destiny of Santa Cruz, at the foot of the Andes, which has grown from 60,000 inhabitants in 1960 to over 1 million today.

Migrants left the Andes for the border cities in order to do business with the richer Brazilians. Old schemes of mobility, linked to agrarian poverty, were revived by traders and Andeans, thanks to the mastering of informational networks, generally by families who stretched from the free zones of Iquique (Chile) to the oriental border regions. Their business activities gave rise to a cross-border zone between Brazil and Bolivia, and abundant bilateral exchanges in this zone extended the area immensely. The oriental border also attracted illicit drug trafficking. Cocaine produced in Peru and Bolivia was exported via these border cities to Brazil, which was both a market for consumers and a re-exportation area for the transformed powder. Andean retailers were the main vector of Bolivian national identity on this border. Originating from core national history, the *macizo boliviano*, they developed a nationalism that was both more precocious and more profound than that of the original populations of the *Oriente*. They integrated the discourses that instituted the legal borders as ramparts of Bolivianity and the pioneer fronts as horizons to the future of the country. Once on the border, they put these discourses to the test and 'bolivianised' the border towns. There are many examples of this. For instance, they imported many products from the Altiplano, and products such as *chuños*, dehydrated potatoes made by a local process of unfreezing and characteristic of Andean food, made their appearance in the markets of border towns. The traditional porosity of border towns decreased and the influence of Brazilian cultural models diminished: Portugal and the Portuguese retreated. Typical Altiplano dances like the *tinkus, caporales* or *morenadas* were reinstituted. The capacity for border segregation increased dramatically as the border became the rampart of Bolivianity so longed dreamed of from the Andes.

A good illustration of this phenomenon is the trading village of Montevideo on the *Acre* border. Before the arrival of the first settlers in 1986, all that existed was an abandoned Bolivian customs post, with a military post

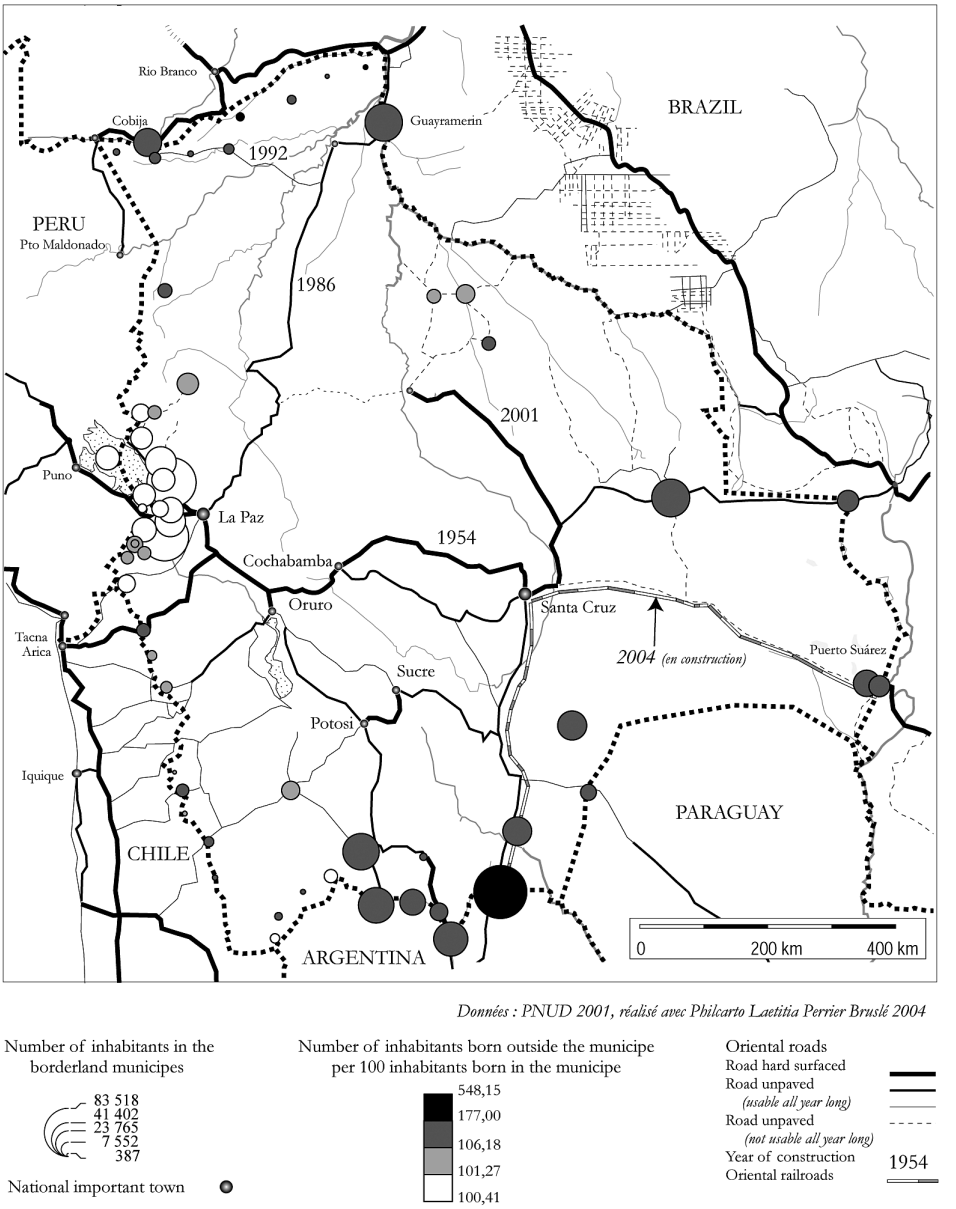

FIGURE 4 Routes and migration – The miracle equation.

dispatched from Navale. Forty families came to live in this pilot town. The head of the village, Don Antonio, arrived in 1987 from La Paz with two crates of products to sell. With his profits, he built a house on the marsh on the Bolivian side of the river, and with the help of other families, he developed a village for Bolivians. They built a school to teach Bolivian education; although they also taught rudimentary Spanish to Brazilians across the line,

classes were set to Bolivian time (there is a one-hour difference between Brazil and Bolivia). From Brazil, they bought drinking water, consumer products, and health services. Thus, this village that was 'disconnected' from the rest of Bolivia proudly said it is the first Bolivian village on the Bolivian side of the border. 'Montevideo is a Bolivian reoccupation centre', notes Ramiro V. Paz.[40]

CONCLUSION

The Bolivian–Brazilian border did not begin as a fixed limit, only to be washed away by trans-national flows. On the contrary, it began as an immaterial border conceived by the leaders of the new republic who, acting more as jurists than contractors, and countering occupancy, privileged their decision on the basis of the principle of *Uti possidetis juris*. As a legacy of Tordesillas, the border owes much of its strength to its prestigious origins. However, in the field, this border was invisible. Being so far from the national centre, 'Bolivianisation' remained in limbo due to the occupation of territories by the undesirable *Selva* populations. The front was well on the other side of the line, a gap that would remain as long as the territory was entirely controlled by solidly shut borders. However, the front has been moving over the last 20 years and looks as if it is at last reaching the line; the oriental border is now more visible. The Andean migration movement toward the border towns has brought consistency to this boundary. Migrants have taken possession of the area by imposing Bolivian territorial markers that are forged in the Andes, as close to the centre of power as possible. In so doing, they have created a somewhat paradoxical situation in terms of classical border-settlement processes: a trans-border zone in which economic integration with Brazil is fortified but which remains a border/barrier and not a 'relic' of the epoch of nation-states. On the contrary, the economic integration that is occurring in these border areas, carried out by populations with strong national identities, reinforces the feeling of national belonging and fills the gap with neighbouring Brazil. At the same time, border margins once cut from territorial remains are increasingly integrated into Bolivian territory, which gains coherency from it.

The front–border dialectic, active in all South American countries, has long been a problem for Bolivia. The pioneer fronts that should have occupied a great part of its national space had little success due to the state's budget deficiencies. However, Bolivians' fear of losing their country caused them to retaliate against threats to their country's legal borders, which, in the end, crystallised into an objective that was finally capable of sustaining a future for the country. Borders that were detached from all material contingencies became a symbolic element in the illusion of "Bolivianity" and the building of a nation. Today, however, the power of this paradigm

complicates the dynamics of continental integration, and the overall policy is treated with suspicion by Bolivians.

Within the framework of present urban redevelopments, Bolivia views itself as a 'networking country'. This view forces a change both in the meaning of and the goal for borders: ramparts shut from the inside have to open to the Mercosur. Fed by this vernacular geography, which guarantees the nation, public opinion for the most part has been unsought. Indeed, the one solution to the gap between the impossible opening up of the frontier and the distancing of the legal border seems to have escaped Bolivians. The cure to counter the territories' congenital weakness has not been without side effects: It has deprived the country of any possible autonomous evolution.

Dialectics between the line and the front, unique to American lands, are more acutely expressed in Bolivia. The objective of this article was to demonstrate the historic drives to establish these two geographic artefacts, where spatial configurations differ and meet at one point: Implemented as social projects, they federate the building of nations. Because the existence of these two objects has been examined by many observers on many occasions, it was more important to look at their coexistence.

NOTES

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2. S. S. Goes, *Navegantes Bandeirantes Diplomatas: Aspectos da descoberta do continente da penetraçao do territorio brasileiro extra Tordesilhas e do estabelecimento das fronteiras da Amazonia* (Brasilia: Instituto de Pesquisa deRelacoes internacionais (IPRI), Fundacao Alexandre de Gusmao, 1991) p. 72.

3. Goes (note 2); E. Reclus, *Amérique du Sud: L'Amazone et La Plata, Guyanes, Brésil, Paraguay, Uruguay, République Argentine*, Vol. XIX, *Nouvelle Géographie universelle* (Paris: Hachette 1894).

4. J. Lévy and M. Lussault, *Dictionnaire de la géographie et de l'espace des sociétés* (Paris: Belin 2003) p. 384.

5. P. Monbeig, *Pionniers et planteurs de São Paulo* (Paris: Armand Colin 1952).

6. H. Vianna, *Historia do Brasil*, 3rd ed., 2 Vols. (Sao Paulo: Edicoes Melhoramentos 1965 [1952]) p. 42.

7. H. Vazquez Machicado, *Para una historia de los limites entre Bolivia y el Brasil*, 2nd ed. (partial rev). (La Paz: Juventud 1990 [1988]).

8. Goes (note 2).

9. The adaptation of European myths to American lands is the same (the women of the Sauromatae people described by Herodotus become the Amazons; the new Jerusalem announced by John the Evangelist resembles the first accounts of the conquistadors; the marvels of Marco Polo are found on the American continent). See the introduction by Michel Lequenne in G. de Carvajal, *Amazonie ventre de l'Amérique. Relation de la première descente de l'Amazone* (L. Técher, French trans) (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon 1994).

10. P. Guichonnet and C. Raffestin, *Géographie des frontières* (Paris: PUF 1974) p. 122.

11. C. Arbaret-Schulz, A. Beyer, J.-L. Piermay, B. Reitel, C. Selimanoski, C. Sohn, and P. Zander, 'La frontière, un objet spatial en mutation', *EspaceTemps.net* (2004), available at <http://espacestemps.net/document842.html>, accessed 17 November 2006.

12. J. Soubin, *Histoire de l'Amazonie* (Paris: Payot 2000) p. 146.

13. The Portuguese were responsible for the critical innovation in South American cartography that occurred at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was characterised by very exact surface measurements in the drawing of the continent, as illustrated by the world map drawn by Guillaume Delisle (1716). M. Droulers, 'L'espace et le développement au Brésil: de la géophagie à la géosophie?' *Revue Tiers Monde* 167 (2001) pp. 673–688.

14. J. Turner, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History', *Report of the American Historical Association* (1893) pp. 199–227.

15. A palimpsest is a parchment manuscript in which the first text was erased so a new text could be written.

16. Turner (note 14).

17. B.-F. Gérard, 'La frontière n'a pas de limites', *Cahier des Sciences Humaines* 30/3 (1994) pp. 551–568.

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19. J. Pilar Garcia, *Cruz y arado, fusiles y discursos, la construccion de los Orientes en el Peru y Bolivia 1820 – 1940* (Lima: IFEA, IEP 2001); J. Pilar Garcia (coord.), *La construccion de la Amazonia Andina*, siglos XIX-XX (Quito: Abya-Yala 1994).

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22. M.-D. Demelas, *Nationalisme sans nation? La Bolivie au XIX et XXème siècle* (Toulouse: Centre régional de publication de Toulouse CNRS 1980) p. 15.

23. M. Baptista Gumucio (p. 125), in M. Baptista Gumucio and A. Saavedra Weise (eds.), *Antologia Geopolitica de Bolivia* (Cochabamba: Amigos del Libro La viabilidad de Bolivia 1978) p. 119–151.

24. A. Ostria Gutierrez, *Una obra y un destino La politica internacional de Bolivia despues de la guerra del Chaco* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Ayacucho 1946) p. 358.

25. A. Gumucio Dagron, *Bolivie* (Paris: Seuil 1981) p. 13.

26. J. Mendoza (p. 34), in M. Baptista Gumucio and A. Saavedra Weise (eds.), *Antologia Geopolitica de Bolivia* (La Paz: Los Amigos del Libros [Enciclopedia boliviana] El factor geografico en la nacionalidad boliviana 1978 [1925]) p. 31–55.

27. R. Pourtier, 'Espace et Nation en Afrique centrale: La dimension oubliée', *Historiens et géographes* 379 (2002) pp. 163–169 [p. 164].

28. This popular upheaval degenerated in street fights between the army and protesters, leaving 85 dead on 17 October 2003. Gonzalo Sanchez Lozada, re-elected just a few months earlier, fled the country.

29. M. L. Bohan, *Informe de la mission economica Bohan a Bolivia* (La Paz: Bibliotheca del Congresso 1942 [unpublished, revised by L. F. Blanchard, La Paz, April 1942]) p. 29.

30. Gumucio Dagron (note 25) p. 10.

31. J. Mendoza, *El factor geografico en la nacionalidad boliviana* (Sucre: Imp. Bolivar 1925) p. 935.

32. J. Mendoza (note 26) p. 31.

33. J. Mendoza (note 26) p. 35.

34. The Bolivian-Brazilian border is the longest of the 10 Brazilian dyads.

35. Pilar Garcia, *Cruz y arado* (note 19) p. 251.

36. Consejo Supremo de defensa nacional, *Politica de fronteras y asentamientos humanos* (La Paz: CONASE 1988); Consejo Supremo de defensa nacional, *Estudios de las politicas para el desarollo de fronteras* (La Paz, unpublished [classified document] 2001).

37. C. Bravo and M. Ballivian, *La patria boliviana, estado geografico* (La Paz: Imprenta La Paz 1894) p. 74.

38. J. M. Dalence, *Bosquejo estadistico de Bolivia*, 2nd ed. (La Paz: UMSA 1975 [1851]) p. 118.

39. Pilar Garcia, *Cruz y arado* (note 19) p. 254.

40. Interview, March 2003.