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# **Payments for Ecosystem Services and Social Justice: Using recognition theories to assess the Bolivian *Acuerdos Recíprocos por el Agua***

## **Abstract**

Payments for ecosystem services (PES) have been the subject of a great amount of literature among which questions of social justice are an important topic. However, we show that most of these studies tend to depoliticize the debate by considering mostly liberal and redistributive notions of justice. We argue that injecting the notion of recognition allows a better depiction of complex local power dynamics and situations of (in)justice. We, therefore, briefly review the social and political philosophical theories of recognition before using the notion of recognition as an analytical tool to assess a Bolivian PES (*Acuerdos Recíprocos por el Agua*, ARA). We show how PES transform recognition relationships between upstream service providers and the formerly rather disinterested service consumers, including municipal authorities, by creating new narratives and channels of recognition. We also highlight the fragility of this process as well as the persisting misrecognition of the poorest of the poor (immigrants, small landowners) that is strengthened by this PES at the intra-community level. Finally, we highlight the potential instrumental use of recognition that could be made by PES promoters as well as counter-hegemonic use potentially made by marginalized actors.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Payments for ecosystem services (PES) are a contemporary instrument of environmental governance inspired by the Coasian assumption that decentralized agreements reached through direct negotiation and private transactions between actors involved in provisioning and consumption of ecosystem services (such as carbon sequestration, water quality, reduction of drought and flood risks or cultural and recreation activities) are more effective and efficient in inducing mutually desired behavioral changes than top-down centralized regulations and Pigouvian taxes and subsidies defined and enforced by the state (Van Hecken & Bastiaensen, 2010). In a vivid debate it has either been positively recommended or critically rejected as a “market-based” (neoliberal) instrument even when in practice it almost never involves any broad-based aggregation of preferences (demand) and provisioning costs (supply) typical of the market mechanism (Engel et al., 2008; Gómez-Baggethun & Ruiz-Pérez, 2011). Unsurprisingly, the inevitable hybrid, mixed institutional nature of PES is now widely recognized in the literature (Muradian, Corbera, Pascual, Kosoy & May, 2010; Muradian & Gómez-Baggethun, 2013; Van Hecken, Bastiaensen & Windey, 2015; Vatn, 2010; Boisvert et al., 2013).

Recent research has presented detailed analyses of these hybrid institutionalization processes in a series of case studies (Aznar et al., 2008; McAfee and Shapiro, 2010; Rodríguez-de-Francisco and Boelens, 2016; Shapiro-Garza, 2013b; Van Hecken et al., 2012), with some studies particularly focusing on the distributional consequences of the socioeconomic outcomes of the emerging “new” institutional arrangements (Greiner and Stanley, 2013; Hoang et al., 2013; Mahanty et al., 2013; Rios and Pagiola, 2010; Van Hecken et al., 2012; Zammit, 2013). Much of that literature underlines that the geographical areas considered most suitable for ecosystem services delivery are often marginalized and poor areas in the Global South, and that, therefore, PES can also be seen as a way to integrate poor, marginalized populations within market economies, making them

co-beneficiaries of the broader ecosystem services that they generate. PES initiatives thus become portrayed as a possible social and ecological *win-win solution* (Pokorny, Johnson, Medina & Hoch, 2012; (Muradian et al., 2013) with the potential to improve social justice (Adams et al., 2004) through the addition of pro-poor objectives to the goal of effective and efficient environmental governance (Pascual et al., 2010).

Most of PES analysis, however, states that the mere facilitation of poor people's access to new ecosystem service markets is not enough to durably combat their poverty. Structures that underlie poverty and generate domination and injustice have to be considered and fought against to avoid their reproduction. This is based on an institutional understanding of poverty (Bastiaensen, De Herdt & D'Exelle, 2005), which cannot be considered as a residual individual situation of unadapted people, but is rather the outcome of biased identity-based relational processes (Mosse, 2010). Free and improved access to markets is considered as one means of exercising freedom but is certainly not enough to allow marginalized groups to "get out of their 'oppressed people' status and to concretize their aspirations to freedom and emancipation" (Guérin, 2015: 195, pers. trans.). Freedom requires the transformation of power relationships and social norms underlying domination and injustice so that they become the source of recognition, solidarity and emancipation.

Debates around justice and equity appear as central themes in PES research, in particular among studies evaluating social consequences of PES in developing countries (Calvet-Mir et al., 2015). Yet, most of this research is inspired by a relatively confined array of conceptualizations of justice, thus limiting the scope of the analysis. In this paper, we, therefore, explore and illustrate the enhanced analytical potential of a notion of justice based upon the concept of recognition as a social category. We will show how injecting the notion of recognition avoids depoliticizing the debate induced by liberal and redistributive notions of justice by allowing a better depiction of complex local power dynamics and situations of (in)justice among PES schemes.

The term "recognition" refers to both a cognitive action (the awareness that something we perceive had been perceived before) and to the act of someone's affirming the existence of someone else. Significantly, in French, the term "recognition" ("reconnaissance") is synonymous with the term for "gratitude" or "gratefulness," which is defined according to the French Larousse dictionary as an "affectionate feeling towards a benefactor." Recognition would then mean both what we feel in relation to ourselves (thanks to the Other) and what we feel toward this same Other that recognized us. Therefore, recognition is now commonly accepted as having "a social relevance" (Guibet Lafaye, 2007: 1, pers. trans.), as it "implies otherness and intersubjectivity" (op. cit.: 7, pers. trans.)—we need the Other in order to be recognized, and the recognition relationship established with the Other is not independent from the social and political context in which it takes place, thus establishing its connection to the debate about social justice.

We start our analysis with a brief summary of the social justice topic in PES literature, indicating that it predominantly follows a liberal justice perspective focused upon distributional outcomes, but also acknowledging that a few studies have referred to recognition, yet considered it from a mostly instrumental perspective while limiting its scope to intercultural recognition. The next section walks us through the essence of the debate about recognition and social justice, taking the extreme opposite views of Honneth (positive) and Butler (negative) as our point of departure in

order to result in siding with a more integrated approach (recognition with interactive positive and negative moments) in line with Allen's synthesis. This integrated framework then serves as our conceptual lens to interpret the empirical experiences of the ARA in Bolivia, so illustrating the potential of our integrated recognition–social justice perspective for the analysis of the hybrid institutional dynamics of PES arrangements.

## **2. SOCIAL JUSTICE IN PES LITERATURE**

Notions of justice and equity are quite present in recent literature on PES, yet they legitimate different political discourses and stances. One current study claims that PES have helped poor or marginalized people by contributing to formalizing and securing their hitherto unprotected property rights ((Leimona & Lee, 2008). In this liberal justice perspective, formal property rights are a crucial sign of recognition as a citizen as well as a *conditio sine qua non* for the economic “takeoff”.

Other scholars have focused more in detail on whether poor people gained access to PES or were excluded due to their lack of capital, knowledge or technical capacities (see Mahanty, Suich & Tacconi, 2013; Zammit, 2013). This often leads to suggesting corrective measures of pro-poor positive discrimination (Turpie et al., 2008). Most studies, however, confine themselves to considering *de jure* access of poor people to the PES scheme and do not usually contemplate effective participation of “the poor” within the scheme's governance or within negotiations about the price of ecosystem services. There is a positive bias in favor of PES, assuming that those schemes are automatically benefiting the disadvantaged if they can access those schemes.

Finally, still others have investigated whether poor people have effectively increased their net income through their participation in PES (see Cole, 2010; Hoang, Do, Pham, van Noordwijk & Minang, 2013). These studies analyze the models of benefit redistribution (may they be monetary or in kind) as well as the criteria underlying those models (equality, need or merit). They also take account of poor people's access to “co-benefits” like capacity building in technology or access to the job market (Courtney et al., 2013). Again, a better redistribution is to be ensured through pro-poor corrective measures.

Common to all these studies is an underlying understanding of justice as a “fair” distribution of either rights or burdens and benefits, which is a central criterion of distributive notions of justice (Walker, 2009). The idea of justice as fair distribution can be traced to the writing of John (Rawls, 1971). Rawls distinguished between fair inequalities (those that favor the most unprivileged) and unfair inequalities (those that favor the already privileged). He argued that social justice can be reached by reducing unfair inequalities and promoting fair inequalities. Fair inequalities can be identified by applying the “veil of ignorance”, i.e., a thought experiment about the just society in which one does not a priori know what one's position in society will be, which leads to an option for a society in which the worst-off can achieve a maximum level of welfare. The resulting “maximin” principle implies a preference for tools of positive discrimination and pro-poor mechanisms favoring the most destitute by eliminating unproductive inequity. More in general, redistributive justice is referred to when speaking of equity as “the distribution of socio-economic factors and goods in a society according to an agreed set of principles or criteria” (Corbera et al., 2007: 589). Approaches to redistributive justice are also influenced by neo-Marxist theories, like the one of Harvey (1996), which considers unfair inequalities as expressions of structural

oppression or, in the case of environmental injustice, as “ecological imperialism” (Martin, 2013: 101), linked to “processes of ethnic classification and differentiated citizenship” (Anthias & Radcliffe, 2015: 257). In all these views, justice is understood through the prism of equity and distribution of goods, rights, benefits or burdens. The “fairness” of this distribution is then evaluated based on different criteria (merit, need, etc.).

However, distributive visions of social justice have been criticized by more recent social justice theorists, mostly because of their consequentialist character (Policar, 2006). This means that they focus on the fairness of the result of an action and not on the fairness of the processes leading to a specific outcome, i.e., they prioritize fairness of the end over fairness of the means. Moreover, critics of distributive social justice affirm that it is “disconnected” from field realities and claims of justice as expressed by social actors and movements, always containing claims concerning not only distribution but also participation and recognition (Schlosberg, 2007; Walker, 2009). Recent theories of social and environmental justice, therefore, favor more empirical and practical definitions of justice (Martin et al., 2014), involving a pluralist view of justice that distinguishes three complementary dimensions: redistribution, participation and recognition (Schlosberg, 2007).

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This alternative view has led several authors to start exploring the links between recognition, social justice and power in another way (Dubet, 2008; Fraser, 2005; Garapon, 2006; Honneth, 2004; McNay, 2008; Rosa, 2012; Young, 2007). Some initial and timid traces can also be found in PES literature. Martin et al. (2014) and He and Sikor (2015) also use the notion of recognition as one criterion of evaluation of PES. They mostly draw on Nancy Fraser’s theory of social justice that considers social recognition as an instrumental condition of social justice as long as it is directed toward increasing people’s participation in social life. However, the conceptualization of recognition in both of those PES studies shows several biases and limitations.

First, recognition is considered exclusively through the lens of respect for cultural differences between subjects. Due to the risk of subordinate, exploitative or exclusionary, incorporation of certain sociocultural categories and its normalization through legitimizing narratives of cultural characteristics (Trigano, 2007), it is, however, necessary to take some distance from multicultural policies based upon a relativist positioning that merely focuses on cultural differences (Policar, 2006). We should focus on recognition of the common human condition, i.e., recognition as a general status of citizens, or even as human beings. By doing so, we are not intending to deny cultural differences, but as proposed by Charles Taylor (1994), we aspire to reconcile the policy of the universal and policy of differences, the “ideal of authenticity and equal dignity” (Spector, 2014: s.p., pers. trans.), or, said differently, to go beyond the extremes of liberal egalitarianism and communitarian differentialism, which can both be considered as “extreme ideological forms of intolerance” (Müller, 2003: 51, pers. trans.), respectively to difference or to same-being. This is in line with recent theories of recognition that consider “equality within difference” (ibid.), meaning that “every equal treatment is not identical and must, to some extent, consider differences” (ibid., pers. trans.). These considerations echo with recent postcolonial literature and especially with the proposition of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, aiming for a “double postcolonial human right: we have the right to be equals when difference belittles us, we have the right to be different when equality decharacterizes us” (Santos, 2010: 66, pers. trans.). De Sousa Santos’

postcolonial referential rightly aims to recognize sociopolitical determinants of the production of difference, while refusing the homogenization of value systems and favoring respect for value pluralism.

In this way, what could appear as contradictory is actually the foundation of the dynamic and ambivalent transformation process to which recognition contributes. Nancy Fraser will, therefore, propose to consider recognition in terms of “status”: the “status of group members as full partners in social interaction” (Fraser, 2001: 24). Fraser indeed argues that only when actors are considered “as *peers*, capable of participating on a par with one another in social life, then we can speak of *reciprocal recognition* and *status equality*” (ibid., emphasis in original).

A second problem with Martin et al. (2014) and He & Sikor (2015) is that they tend to consider recognition as fundamentally positive from a normative perspective. The authors recognize the ties between structures of recognition and power structures but do not consider that recognition could serve domination and injustice. Current post-structuralist literature has, however, convincingly shown that recognition can be a tool of subordination and reproduction of power structures. Even Nancy Fraser (2005) draws our attention to the fact that recognition is synonymous with justice if and only if it is combined with redistribution and oriented toward parity of participation in social life. This is why we argue that there is a need for a more elaborated and balanced approach to recognition within the PES debate about social justice. In order to construct this approach, we now assemble its conceptual building blocks from the recent philosophical debates about justice and recognition.

### **3. RECOGNITION AND SOCIAL (IN)JUSTICE IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THEORY**

We understand recognition as a social and dynamic relationship between subjects that defines their position within social interaction (Skeggs, 2001), not an individual asset to be allocated fairly. This is in line with both post-structuralist and critical philosophy scholars, who beyond this fundamental agreement, however, differ substantially in the way they perceive the links between recognition, power and social justice.

#### ***3.1 Intersubjective recognition and social justice according to Honneth***

Critical philosopher Axel Honneth (2004), proposes an overall positive account of recognition, considering it an essential component of the *good life*.

In the continuity of the thought of Jürgen Habermas (1987)<sup>1</sup> Honneth defines recognition as an intersubjective, horizontal and moral relationship (preserved from power relationships and strategic action) that takes place within the space of public institutions and the daily routine of social life. According to Honneth, subjects normatively expect their “abilities to be recognized by the generalized Other” (Honneth, 2004: 134, pers. trans.). This recognition is a fundamental condition of the formation of the political subject. Denial of recognition is tantamount to denying the individual his subjectivity. It takes the form of contempt and disrespect and constitutes a

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<sup>1</sup> Habermas (1987) considers that subjects are constructed through a process of intersubjective interaction, within the sphere of the lived world (lifeworld). The latter operates on the principle of communicational, mutual and non-strategic rationality sheltered from power and strategic action, which intervene only as external constraints to the process of formation of the subject.

“*symbolic discrimination*” (Guérin et al., 2011: 321, pers. trans., emphasis added), which is considered a form of injustice at the origin of “moral conflicts”.

Honneth distinguishes three institutional “spheres” in which these recognition relationships take place: 1) the family in which primary recognition relationships such as love are created; 2) the state in which recognition relations of a legal nature develop that can be assessed in terms of respect and rights; 3) the civil society where recognition relationships of social types develop, appreciable in terms of social esteem. These relationships of recognition are constitutive of subjectivity, thanks to their products: self-confidence (family), self-respect (state) and self-esteem (civil society).

Honneth goes further and asserts that social justice is equal to fair recognition. Expanding recognition thus becomes the best and only way to make society fairer: “What is fair or good within a society can be measured by its capacity to ensure conditions of reciprocal recognition, which allow the formation of personal identity [...] to be fulfilled in a satisfying manner” (Honneth, 2004: 134, pers. trans.). French theorist Alain Caillé (2007), who considers recognition as the horizon of relations of gift/counter-gift, agrees. According to him, the act of giving and receiving is a way of confirming certain qualities of the other and is, therefore, an act of recognition. The refusal to give or give back can be interpreted as a desire to “misrecognize the identity of one’s interlocutor” (Cardoso de Oliveira & Caillé, 2007: 92, pers. trans.), even to despise it.

In line with other authors (Fraser, 2004; Young, 2007; Bader, 2007), we share Honneth’s idea of recognition as a social relationship that can, at least temporarily, be mutual and agree with its importance for the subject’s identity formation. However, we oppose Honneth’s monist vision, exclusively seeing social justice through the lens of recognition and equating recognition with social justice.

We follow Bader (2007) in that misrecognition certainly consists of a form of injustice but that every injustice cannot be reduced to a form of misrecognition. Thus, a form of pluralism needs to be maintained when conceptualizing social justice. This pluralism could be reinforced by conceptualizations of justice based on perceptions and experiences of situations of injustice, as lived and perceived by the victims. Young (2007) indeed states the impossibility of reducing the very form of the social struggle to a struggle for recognition, as intended by Axel Honneth (2000). She rightly affirms that this would make other forms of injustice and domination invisible and depoliticize situations of injustice by prioritizing social relationships over power relationships.

Also, Fraser (2004) considers that recognition cannot foster social justice on its own as fair redistribution is an unavoidable co-condition of social justice. In her view, misdistribution is actually an obstacle to fair participation in social and political life and, therefore, an essential cause of injustice just like misrecognition because both hinder political subjectivity. Redistribution and recognition are thus two non-substitutable co-conditions. Fraser (2005) refers to parity of participation in social life or the “framing” according to which individuals are considered full partners in social interactions. This “status” of a full participant leads to self-respect, political subjectivity and the awareness of oneself as a producer of one’s own political actions, which are all conducive to social justice. Claims and notions of justice cannot be a priori defined because they are influenced by socioeconomic and political contexts in their historical

dimensions. Consequently, claims and notions of justice vary and will give more weight to either redistribution or to recognition in a given historical context. Actions and policies that aim at increasing social justice will, therefore, have to adapt and take into account specific claims of recognition (as well as the specific notions of justice underlying them).

However, even when recognition is a condition of social justice, it does not systematically lead to social justice. Recognition is fair and leads to justice only if it is combined with redistribution and oriented toward parity of participation in social life. For Fraser, recognition should be seen as a condition to reaching this parity of participation and not as an end in itself, thus opening the door for considering that recognition might, in certain cases, also be a tool of subordination and injustice.

We agree with these critics of Honnethian recognition theories who regret the unequivocal separation between mutual and dialogical recognition relationships (which constitute subjectivity) on the one side and power relationships considered as an external variable on the other side. Honneth thinks of recognition as an ideal of mutuality being perverted by external power relationships. This would, according to McNay (2008), induce a positive bias toward recognition. Moreover, Honneth also considers the need for recognition as the origin of social behaviors, which leads him to naturalize this need for recognition. This idealization and naturalization of recognition motivate Honneth to think of recognition as the unique prism through which social life should be evaluated.

Judith Butler strongly opposes this vision and helps us balance the overly positive approach of Honneth. Butler indeed considers recognition not as a positive but potentially perverted ideal of good social life but rather as the proper and central tool within processes of subjection, which should be understood as subject creation and subordination.



**3.2 Recognition, subjection and domination according to Judith Butler**

Butler (1997) opposes Honneth’s idea of recognition as an “ideal” of mutuality and intersubjectivity. For her, moral principles are, above all, political principles (Butler, 2016). She follows Michel Foucault and the post-structuralist tradition by understanding power as a constitutive force that acts in subject formation through social norms materialized in discourses and everyday practices. The key idea here is that human actions and relationships are inevitably informed and constrained by the institutional framework in which they are embedded.

Butler also anchors this subject formation by power and the related individual self-subordination to power structures in a psychoanalytical analysis of the “psychic” components of those processes (Butler, 1997). The recognition relationship is then not so much a direct horizontal intersubjective relationship but rather a relationship between a subject and the social norms that constitutes and mediates it. Individuals must indeed first be “recognizable” in order to be recognized (Butler, 2005: 23), i.e., they must first conform to established norms (linked to power structures) to become recognized subjects. “[T]he terms by which I confer recognition are not mine alone, that I did not single-handedly devise or craft... In a sense, I submit to a norm of recognition when I offer recognition to you” (op. cit.: 26). Thus, “to affirm one’s existence is to capitulate to one’s subordination” (Butler, 1997: 79). Subsequently, regulation systems will strategically use this



“power” of recognition to increase compliance with social norms, and the promise of recognition becomes an instrument of assimilation (Baird, 2006) and subordination.

Nonetheless, if this process of assimilation and subordination lingers and reproduces over time, it is because it is based on a “disciplinary cultivation of attachment to subjection” (Butler, 1997: 102). Indeed, Butler argues that all subjects develop a certain attachment toward power structures and social norms that allow them to define their identity or, better said, to position themselves as a subject and “gain social existence” (op. cit.: 79). This attachment will grow even if it causes subordination and potential suffering, because the subject will always prefer to be subordinated over “lacking any social existence whatsoever” (Allen, 2006: 203). Butler (1997) estimates that subjects would never dare to question the terms by which they gained social existence for fear of losing their subject identity. Because of this psycho-affective attachment to power structures, subjects actively participate in the reproduction of these structures by reiterating the social norms and practices embedded in power structures.

Quite opposed to Honneth, Butler thus brings us a view of recognition as a conveyor of domination and not emancipation. Here, emancipation can only occur by resisting recognition. Nonetheless, as we have seen, Butler considers that subjects will never take the risk of contradicting power structures and their social existence out of fear of losing their subject identity. Resistance, therefore, becomes highly improbable. Butler considers resistance as a “slippage” (Schurr, 2014 : 105) within the process of reiteration of social norms and structures of domination, which is mostly due to chance. Butler refuses the possibility of mutual, non-subordinating recognition relationships because she considers subordination to be at the core of the process of subjection, i.e., at the core of the creation of the subject. Subjects might in some cases manage to contest the structures providing recognition, but they would irremediably attach to other structures conferring new recognition that might, at best, be a little less subordinating and/or imply reduced suffering.

At first sight, Honneth’s and Butler’s positions on recognition appear irreconcilable. One sees recognition as an ideal of mutuality, leading to emancipation through processes of social struggles, and the other considers recognition to be the tool of a hypocritical reproduction of power, leading to an unavoidable domination. Inspired by Amy Allen, however, we believe that both can actually be integrated in a “middle ground” (Allen, 2007: 117) view where recognition can bring and express both emancipation and domination at the same time and where the process of subject formation is conceptualized as straddling mutual interaction and subordination.

### ***3.3 Amy Allen: Recognition between emancipation and domination processes***

We agree with Amy Allen that Butler’s theory of recognition “moves too quickly from the fact of primary dependency to the inevitability of subordination” (op. cit.: 27), probably due to Butler’s “conflation of dependency with power and power with subordination” (ibid.). Sure, our need for attachment certainly makes us dependent on the other, but every dependence relationship (even if it confers power to those on whom we depend) does not inescapably generate subordination and suffering. Recognition makes us dependent on the other (that recognizes us) and thus vulnerable to domination but not systematically dominated. We do not consider recognition relationships as

independent from power relationships. They are sensitive to the subjection paradox,<sup>2</sup> but they are not *only or automatically* subordinating and equal to unavoidable domination. In line with Allen, we refuse to consider recognition as being either fundamentally mutual or deeply subordinating and regard it as ambivalent and dynamic (Allen, 2006) with the ability to alternate between different “moments” that can be more or less subordinating. Allen follows Benjamin (1995) by affirming that “the negative, destructive aspect of human relationships does not undermine or eliminate the possibility of mutual recognition” (Allen, 2006: 215). However, mutual recognition is only possible within dynamic human relationships as a “moment” (ibid.) that alternates with other domination moments. Nonetheless, it is fundamental to “understand this positive moment of recognition as well, and the possibility of positive, sustaining connections with others” (Allen, 2006: 216) without denying its destructive avatar to “do justice to the ambivalent nature of intersubjectivity” (ibid.) as well as its unpredictable character.

This vision of recognition as ambivalent and dynamic allows resistance and social change to be conceived. It allows us to consider resistance as “creat[ing] alternative modes of attachment and structures of social recognition ... providing new modes of recognition, new possibilities for attachment and thus, new ways of becoming subjects” (Allen, 2006: 218). Subject formation remains embedded in a discursive process but is sufficiently autonomous to be able to critically assess its constitutive discourses during their reiteration processes. This corresponds to Benhabib (1992, 2002), for whom the subject is narratively constructed, which means that subject identity is a situated construction to which the subject can contribute by constructing his or her own narrative. Thus, the subject is sometimes able to transform dominant narratives as well as create new or “counter-narratives” (Salmon, 2007: 213) and enroll others in these new constructions aimed at “blocking the story-making machine” (ibid., pers. trans.). These counter-narratives constitute the “mean, both poetic and political, of a de-subordination and of new subjection of individuals through strategies of passing, displacing and diverting performed identity pinnings” (Fonkoua, Perrot-Carpet & Tomiche, 2015: s.p., pers. trans). As highlighted by Cleaver (2012), this implies the need to consider “diversity in social phenomena, the potentially creative effects of individual agency and ... the enduring influence of social structures in shaping individual behaviour and in the patterning of outcomes” (op. cit.: 13) if we want to allow for more possibilities of inclusive change to be “sufficiently sensitive to social diversity and cultural styles, and to the visible and invisible workings of power” (Van Hecken, Bastiaensen & Windey, 2015a: 9).

Postcolonial scholars, in particular in the Latino American tradition, also contribute to illustrating, deepening and contextualizing our understanding of the political and structural dimension of recognition and misrecognition (Mignolo, 2009). Indeed, since the “original sin” of colonization (Santos, 2011: 28, pers. trans.), “class domination and ethno-cultural domination feed on each other, which means that the struggle for equality cannot be separated from the fight for recognition of difference” (ibid., pers. trans.). Quiroga Díaz (2009) believes that Latin American countries share a form of “structural injustice” toward women and natives, suffering from historical misrecognition, based on colonial and neocolonial collective representations in which “ancestral knowledge, respect for the land, intuition and the non-commercial were associated with

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<sup>2</sup> Affirming that subjects are constituted by power and at the same time subordinated to it.

the feminine and devalued by categories of superstition and arrears” (Quiroga Díaz, 2009: 79, pers. trans.).

However, in line with Allen’s view, because they consider the possibility of resistance by making “counter-hegemonic use of hegemonic instruments” (Santos interviewed in Ziai, 2013: 730), postcolonial authors avoid the trap of the “over-victimization” of the misrecognized who have been historically dismissed and “socially, economically but also symbolically dominated, because they were judged incapable of self-knowledge, of power to act, such inert matter having to receive its form and norm from the outside” (Labica, 2012: 106, pers. trans.).

When thus considered critically, recognition appears as an interesting analytical tool that allows both emancipation and subordination dynamics to be highlighted. Informed by the ambivalent and dynamic character of recognition, following Amy Allen’s idea to include a time perspective in our analyses, we will question both views: that recognition is provided by a Bolivian PES scheme as well as the hypothesis that service providers are emancipated through this recognition within the PES. Through our Bolivian case studies, we aim to show the potential of an analysis of recognition structures among PES to improve understanding of power and justice dynamics on the ground.

#### **4. ANALYZING JUSTICE IN A BOLIVIAN PES SCHEME THROUGH THE LENS OF AMBIVALENT RECOGNITION**

Our case study is a local scheme called *Acuerdos Recíprocos por el Agua* (ARA, Reciprocal Agreements for Water) in the department of Santa Cruz, eastern Bolivia. It was initiated in 2003 when a local NGO, *Fundación Natura Bolivia* (FNB), joined with downstream institutional actors of a local watershed (i.e., municipal authorities, water users’ cooperatives, sometimes irrigators’ associations), called watershed service beneficiaries, in thirty different municipalities to create and financially contribute to a local PES fund. The money collected is used to compensate upstream de jure owners of forest who agree to put part of their forest lands in conservation or reduce grazing activities, thus becoming watershed service providers. Compensations consist of beehives, coffee or fruit tree plants, water tanks and tubes and so forth as well as capacity building related to the use of these new items. The amount of compensation depends on the amount of land conserved as well as on the distance between the plot and the river catchments but does not fully cover economic opportunity costs. Compensations are given to the formal owners of land and exclude tenants and de facto users—mostly immigrants—who do not have a title.

In Bétrisey and Mager (2015), we detailed the process of institutionalization of the ARA. Using Karl Polanyi’s framework, we showed how the exchange relationships within the ARA were a mix of three ideal types, namely, market exchange, redistribution and reciprocity. We identified the ARA as a hybrid institutional arrangement set up through a process that could be compared to what is named “an institutional bricolage”, that is to say the production of new ideas, practices, meanings combining pre-existing ideational and institutional elements with the strategic aim to build an innovative reference frame of rules, standards and values proposing a certain consensus between actors with different ideologies and aspirations, which does not exclude to favour a reconfiguration promoting vested interests (Benford et al., 2012; Campbell, 2007, 2004; Cleaver, 2012).

In this perspective, the ARA articulate new references to ecosystem services market exchange with local logics of redistribution and reciprocity (in particular the practice of mutual labor exchange known as *ayne*). This process of bricolage is dynamic and constantly reinvented by the different stakeholders through processes of negotiation involving their social values and economic and political interests.

According to the FNB director, “what is lacking [in order to efficiently conserve nature in rural Bolivia] is not economic means and money, what is lacking is the institutional structure” (2014, pers. communication). Since its creation in the early 2000s, FNB has, therefore, intended to create new institutions for conservation, avoiding command and control schemes, while also rejecting the ideal of market mediation, in particular by trying to harness so-called traditional norms of collective and reciprocal action (anonymous, FNB, August 2014, pers. communication). Although FNB is not pretending to solve poverty (anonymous, FNB, 2014, pers. communication), it explicitly addresses the social component of the projected conservation institutions (Fundación Natura Bolivia, 2014), aiming to create fairer institutions (anonymous, FNB, 2012, pers. communication). We now analyze the sociopolitical dynamics and implications of the institutionalization of these new ARA arrangements and question their implications in terms of social justice through the use of our recognition conceptual framework.

#### **4.1 Methodology**

Tracing back the details of the recognition framework required an in-depth, mainly ethnographic research strategy complemented by qualitative interviews and direct observation. Between 2012 and 2014, therefore, we conducted three fieldwork investigations for a total of nine months in fourteen communities belonging to the municipalities of El Torno, Comarapa, Pampagrande, Quirusillas and Mairana. We only included communities that had been participating for at least 3 years in the ARA so that informants could give feedback on a relevant period of experience. In total, we conducted 104 interviews with community members: 51 ARA participants and 53 non-participants. We aimed at eliciting their emic interpretations, values and priorities using a combination of informal discussions, semi-structured interviews and participation in communal and municipal meetings involving community actors, municipal authorities, water cooperatives and the staff of FNB. In parallel, we conducted sixteen more formal interviews with institutional actors considered as ES beneficiaries. Six interviews and multiple informal discussions were also conducted with current and former staff of the FNB foundation, complemented with a review of FNB documentation (official reports, papers and online promotional documents) as well as the contents of their Facebook page. These data were critically assessed in order to understand the discursive (and interactive) characteristics of recognition relationships involving different actors and institutions. We do not aim to offer a statistically representative analysis of PES institutionalization processes, but we do think that our situated analysis represents a paradigmatic case of such processes.

#### **4.2 Local context**

First, it is useful to present the local context. The municipal territories are located in the Santa Cruz Valley region, part of the Santa Cruz Department. This region is located at the crossroads of two different ecological zones: the eastern tropical lowlands and the Altiplano. Historically, it has been a region of passage and mixed population groups that have coexisted there since pre-Inca

times (Meyers et al., 2015). Today this region is still experiencing important immigration. In fact, since the 1980s, “the abandonment of mining activities in the Altiplano combined with the demand for labor in the hydrocarbons sector in the Bolivian Lowlands” (Bétrisey, 2016: 121, pers. trans.) and a “collective imagination that considers the eastern and valley regions as a fertile green paradise” (op. cit.: 122, pers. trans.) have led to a “March toward the East” with inhabitants of the Altiplano migrating toward the tropical lowlands, taking the Santa Cruz Valley road and settling on the way. This process “has also been encouraged by successive Bolivian governments as a way of reallocating the unemployed mining sector labour force” (ibid.). These displacements are, however, contested by the *lugareños* (i.e., older settlers) and the “living together proves difficult within the villages and communities visited” (ibid.).

The upstream communities count between 15 and 110 families. They can be characterized as peripheral spaces. In objective terms, they have low accessibility (no regular public transportation, low-quality roads) and lack infrastructure for basic services like education and health (Prefectura del Departamento de Santa Cruz, 2006), sanitation and/or communication. Subjectively, their “peripherycity” can be grounded in a generalized local feeling of marginalization and exclusion from the spaces of political decision-making (Bétrisey, 2016). While belonging to municipal territories, they self-govern through their own community authorities, either age-old agrarian unions (*sindicatos*) or more recent grassroots territorial organizations (*Organizaciones Territoriales de Base*, OTB). Formally, the mission of the OTB is to identify community needs and forward them to municipal authorities as well as to supervise the execution of local public service provision (Prefectura del Departamento de Santa Cruz 2006). In general, relations between communities and municipal authorities are recognized as challenging (Rodriguez & Surkin, 2010), and this is also the case in our study region. Municipal governments often lack financial resources, capacities and political will to address the responsibilities delegated to them in the framework of Bolivian decentralization policies. According to Rodriguez and Surkin (2010), several dysfunctions—among them corruption—prevented the creation of the expected inclusive and participative good governance structures. The continuous national-level reform process led to a complex coexistence of old and new institutional frameworks, making local politics quite complex and harming communication between multi-level political spaces. Community people said that “they suffer from a structural situation of social misrecognition, even contempt, from municipal authorities and downstream pueblos, but also political misrecognition. Indeed, most of the interviewed communities’ representatives and inhabitants felt that they were unsuitably participating in municipal decision-making spaces and are victims of redistributive injustices” (Bétrisey 2016: 147, pers. trans.).

Among the investigated communities, we noted diverse regulations concerning the participation of *comunarios* in OTBs and *sindicatos*. In some *sindicatos*, women are not allowed to vote and are thus excluded from power positions within the community (except if they are widows or when their husband is temporarily absent) (Bétrisey, Mager & Rist, 2016). In communities organized around an OTB, women are usually allowed to assist in political meetings, but we observed strong variability regarding women’s effective participation. Theoretically, women can preside over an OTB, but that is quite exceptional, like what happened during two years in the Palma Sola community, but “nevertheless not without suffering from prejudices” (op. cit.: 8).

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In most of the communities organized around agrarian *sindicatos*, *comunarios* who do not own land can often assist in meetings but do not have the right to vote. Thus, “because recent immigrants’ access to land appears quite limited, most of them tend to be excluded from voting and power positions” (ibid.). In some communities these non-owners cannot even assist in the meetings, while in others (mostly in the communities organized around an OTB) they are also allowed to vote. However, even when immigrants can assist and vote, they are often de facto excluded from the deliberations, because the latter are held in Spanish and most of the recent immigrants are only Quechua speaking.

The exclusion of recent immigrants is also symbolic given the fact that prestige within communities is mostly based on the “size of the farm, the amount of livestock held, the participation in community work and the occupation of power positions within the community, which are categories that recent migrants do not have access to” (Bétrisey, 2016: 138, pers. trans.). We observed that they also sometimes face extreme misrecognition such as racism and are often referred to as the main cause of deforestation, although deforestation in the area remains quite low compared to national rates (Le Tellier et al., 2009).

### **4.3 Results**

Our interviews and encounters revealed that “recognition” was a prominent and important motivation for a majority of upstream *campesinos* to engage or disengage from the ARA. Clearly, the economic value of the compensation received was very low, partially symbolic (promoting non-land-based income-generating activities) and only marginally related to the (potential) opportunity costs of maintaining the forests. Recognition indeed appeared repeatedly and explicitly in the interviews, expressed as a hope, an expected result of participation in the scheme as well as a more general way of entering and maintaining horizontal relationships with relevant longer-term partners (FNB and the water service beneficiaries). It was expressed as “being taken into account,” “feeling noticeable and noticed,” “being respected,” being recognized as a municipal “citizen” or as a “human being” by municipal authorities, as well as FNB. So, recognition was expected both in terms of social esteem by civil society, represented here by the FNB, and also in terms of being taken into account by actors of the political sphere (the representatives of the municipal authorities participating in the ARA), as illustrated by citations like this: “This project also helped because many people got to know us so that, at the end, he [the mayor] couldn’t ignore us [the community] anymore but had to take us into account” (anonymous, Palma Sola, October 2012, pers. trans., cited in Bétrisey, Mager & Rist, 2016: 9). Recognition was used as one “horizon of meaning” that served as a basis for a moral evaluation and justification to enter the ARA scheme. Conversely, the perception of denial of recognition, expressed as feelings of “abandonment” and “contempt” or “invisibility”, has been an important justification to leave the scheme.

When trying to understand the modalities and grammars of these recognition relationships taking place within the ARA, we need to stress that they were based—at least partially—on a new narrative constructed by the FNB. This new narrative is shedding light on the merit and virtue of service providers (upstream peasants) and on their “sacrifice” to conserve the “water factory” (i.e., the forest), as well as their attributed natural/traditional will to live in harmony with nature. This new narrative around service providers as “honorific forest keepers” (Fundación Natura Bolivia,

2016: s.p.) provides recognition along new categories, a new “grammar”. It is also appropriated and reformulated by some service providers themselves.

This new narrative is put to work during discussions/meetings with the different stakeholders and reinforced and disseminated beyond the service providers through movies and documentaries disseminated by the FNB. In 2010, the FNB produced a short film called *La Fabrica del Agua* (in English, “The Water Factory”),<sup>3</sup> which is widely distributed by FNB and shown to several stakeholders including local water beneficiaries and providers. This short film portrays a young boy from a downstream water-beneficiary village who is adventuring in the upstream water providers’ communities looking for the “water factory”. In his adventure, he will be guided by upstream community members, who are the true heroes of the movie. In this narrative, “marginalized, neglected spaces, inhabited by individuals perceived as ‘ill adapted’, are redefined as strategic spaces” (Bétrisey, 2016: 189, pers. trans.). Peasants from the upstream communities participating in ARAs are also presented as “deserving respect and admiration” (ibid.) for their work in conservation and knowledge related to cultivation and are showcased as such to an (inter)national audience.

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This new recognition narrative has also been performed through the dramatization of compensation distribution moments. Those moments were ritualized and occurred in the community’s main space, in front of everyone, in the presence of representatives of municipal authorities and/or downstream water cooperatives and FNB. People who were given those compensations were applauded, pictures were taken and sometimes FNB organized an event with bands and dancing. FNB has cultivated the emotional dimension of these encounters, considering that the ARAs allow a “different approach” for the conservation of nature (Fundacion Natura Bolivia, 2014: s.p., pers. trans.) and a “new relationship between community actors and official actors downstream (cooperatives, municipal authorities)” (Bétrisey, 2016: 192, pers. trans.). After 2012, this approach was, however, abandoned by the FNB as guaranteeing the presence of different stakeholders and going to sometimes remote communities became too costly and time-consuming. The compensation events that I was able to attend in 2013 and 2014 were indeed carried out in the manner of rapid delivery of compensations to service providers by the FNB, sometimes without even getting out of the car and without the presence of beneficiaries (municipal and/or cooperative authority): very distant from the performance recorded in John Liu’s documentary *Vivir Bien* (Liu, 2014).

Some *comunarios* participating in the ARA expressed their regret at losing the old way of doing things, which they considered more sympathetic. Others expressed a feeling of contempt linked to this new way of delivering compensation: a violation of the principles of mutual recognition. During our last visit, in 2014, we were told that FNB was aware of this problem and wanted to reestablish these moments of “socialization” between actors, to ensure the proper functioning of the ARA but also to keep contributing to the construction of solid local institutions providing respect to all citizens (anonymous, oral communication, August 2014).

The ARA thus emerges as a new channel of recognition, parallel to the existing community and religious channels, with FNB appearing as a new source of recognition. The narrative constructed by the FNB will fill—at least partially—the emotionally connoted expectation of social esteem

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-j-xMS3WuA>, accessed January 12, 2016.

expressed by members of upstream communities as a record of their (non-)participation in ARAs. Several participants also referred to the newly created recognition categories in their own discourse (“service providers,” “water services,” “forest keepers”).

According to Butler (1997), this process of assimilation would be passive and unconscious, but one can also consider that these mechanisms might be (partially) conscious, and even strategically implemented, in order to use prior recognition for a posteriori transformative political action. Conformism is then only temporary, partially strategic and does not mean definitive assimilation. In other words, local people might buy into their newly attributed social identities in order to enjoy recognition and then use this recognition to pursue other, more endogenously desired changes in their relationships with the dominant downstream actors. As Shapiro-Garza (2013a: 137) argues, PES can indeed become “useful engagement surfaces” for local actors with governmental and institutional actors—new spaces for dialogue and interaction where it becomes possible to reiterate political requests.

However, the “new” narrative is not completely independent from other narratives and from structural conditions within communities and municipal territories. This influences the ARA’s implications in terms of justice/emancipation. When looking at the recognition relationships at the collective level, a majority of our downstream and upstream respondents pointed out the capacity of the ARA to improve public recognition of upstream communities. Our interviews taught us that in some cases, these marginalized communities have indeed been better socially and politically recognized downstream, with recognition translated into an expansion of community representatives’ participation in formal political institutions. The former OTB leader of Palma Sola affirmed, for example, that the FNB provided her with assistance, helped her formulate proposals for the municipal annual plans and met peers from other communities, as well as other regional leaders, all of which gave her new capacities as well as confidence. This situation is, however, exceptional because FNB does not usually directly involve the community representatives in the ARA scheme, preferring individual contractual relations with *comunarios*. Local leaders and representatives sometimes perceived this as an act of misrecognition, in the sense of disrespect (anonymous, Santa Rosa Community, September 2013). Therefore, there are also community leaders who see FNB’s action as interference or even as a threat and are unwilling to cooperate.

In this regard, the ARA appears as an innovative institution, one that could be considered an institution of mutual recognition in Honneth’s sense, occurring officially in public institutions and leading to respecting formerly ignored subjects with the potential to transform the conditions of social (in)justice. But while the ARA can provide the initial impetus for mutual recognition, the sustainability and anchorage of this new recognition as well as its translation into effective participation of the communities in municipal arenas and into redistribution of municipal resources to communities, seem to require an in-depth and demanding “mediating effort” (Bétrisey, 2016) on the part of the FNB, which has not been systematically undertaken. In particular, the cyclical conditions and personal characteristics of municipal and community leaders make the process relatively uncertain. So, recognition appears to be something that is not simply given but needs to be continuously reproduced/performed in what we called an evolving process of ongoing institutional bricolage.



If we look at these relationships at the intra-community level, we see a different picture. We first observed an increase in social esteem of the individuals who participate in the scheme, who gain recognition for their work in forest conservation and their new identity of “forest keepers”. However, it is gripping to notice that this new channel actually reiterates the same principle of recognizability already existing in the community. Indeed, local individuals excluded from the new ARA’s recognition channel are those already excluded from the community’s traditional social recognition channels: recent immigrants and small landowners. Other PES studies have already analyzed the difficulties of marginalized and “poorer” individuals in accessing PES (García-Amado, Pérez, Escutia, García & Mejía, 2011; Lansing, 2014; Mahanty et al., 2013; Pascual et al., 2010). However, what we show is that, first, immigrants and small landowners are excluded from the ARA not only because of their initial lack of material resources but also because of their initial misrecognition, and second, this lack of access, of course, prevents them from accessing ARA benefits but also prevents them from improving the recognition of their status within the community through the ARA (Bétrisey, Mager & Rist, 2016). This leads to increasing situations of injustice and domination and indirectly legitimizes the existing power structure.

Finally, we also draw attention to the fact that recognition (or the promise of recognition) could potentially be strategically harnessed by an outside organization in order to canvass and subordinate workers/clients through the newly created channels of recognition. Indeed, to increase the acceptability of the ARA, the FNB constructed a new story presenting upstream *comunarios* as service providers, recognizing them as “courageous actors, disregarding difficulties and having a special relationship with their land and to nature, preserving their forest and deserving to be rewarded for their sacrifice” (Bétrisey, 2016: 202, pers. trans.). They also discursively refer to the logic of reciprocity (the name *Acuerdos Recíprocos por el Agua* is illustrative) and the local reciprocity practice of *ayne*. This allows FNB to both differentiate from other PES schemes and be in line with national discourses and policies that do not support market-based instruments (if ever a PES scheme could be 100% market-based) and also to facilitate acceptability of the ARA among upstream service providers: “Ayne is based on reciprocity: if I help you with sowing, you help me with harvesting, etc. We are doing the same, ayne, but with the forest. When we present things like this, people understand the principle of the ARA more quickly” (anonymous, FNB, personal communication, October 2012, cited in Bétrisey & Mager, 2014: 372).

This storytelling that materializes in new recognition channels is considered “social marketing techniques” by FNB (Asquith, 2013: 23) that facilitate acceptance of the ARA among upstream communities (Asquith, 2015; Fundación Natura Bolivia, s.d.). At the same time, the FNB says in its promotional materials that it proposes a “cheap and fast” forest conservation formula (Fundación Natura Bolivia, s.d.). This could suggest that the compensation provided to providers would be maintained at a low level thanks to these social marketing tools, and thus recognition relationships could be seen as a tool of subordination. The recognition relationship that takes place under these conditions would then be illustrative of Butler’s pessimistic view, especially since it would not provide the material and procedural conditions for obtaining unbiased mutual recognition due to the disjunction between recognition, redistribution and participation (Bétrisey, 2016). However, it seems that the FNB, after a period of decreasing interest, is now investing time and energy in order to both implement and stabilize the institutionalization of the ARA and the

recognition relationships of communities at the municipal level, not only to ensure the acceptability of the ARA but also to contribute to the construction of solid local institutions providing respect to all citizens (anonymous, oral communication, August 2014).

This could also be seen as a result of the enhanced bargaining power of upstream service providers, allowing them more leeway to impose their will on how they want to be treated within these new arrangements and strategically put their interests forward by using these new counter-narratives to their advantage. Upstream peasants can thus also be assumed to make instrumental use of the ARA and FNB, hoping to gain progress in terms of access to power arenas and other indirect benefits for whole communities and conditioning their acceptance of PES to the recognition relationships described above. Therefore, they cannot be regarded as passive consumers of arrangements designed to satisfy them through their “need” for recognition but as making counter-hegemonic use of hegemonic instruments, which is considered an act of resistance by postcolonial scholars (Santos, 2011). Moreover, if we consider, in line with Caillé (2007), that recognition is the horizon of reciprocity relationships, the sole fact that the ARAs consider and do not dismiss reciprocity logic and recognition relationships can be seen as both a sign of recognition of cultural differences and a way to consider claims of social esteem and respect from marginalized people who demand to be recognized as peers and citizens through the setting of reciprocity and recognition relationships.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Our conceptual reframing of the notion of recognition, beyond mere recognition of cultural differences, and its application in the case of the ARA have allowed us to show the socially performative importance and potential of the narrative dimension of PES, including the possibility once introduced of constructing new counter-narratives to bring social and political recognition to farmers’ communities that experience poverty and marginalization within the municipal territories to which they officially belong. However, we also showed how precarious narratively constructed recognition can be and how difficult it is to make this alternative channel of recognition more sustainable and translatable into concrete achievements, mostly due to the power of dominating channels of (mis)recognition. In the case of ARA, we demonstrated that the newly constructed narrative has a transformative impact at the municipality level but that it inevitably remains embedded in existing local practices, thus risking further situations of injustice and misrecognition at the intra-community level, especially for recent immigrants. Finally, we showed how these newly created channels of recognition could be both instrumentalized by the most powerful stakeholders and turned into new channels of subordination and diverted by marginalized groups that could make counter-hegemonic use of those instruments in order to gain political recognition. This allows for a more nuanced and informed understanding of PES impact on poverty and justice on the ground.

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