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The emergence of MAS-IPSP in Bolivia as a case of partisan struggle for recognition

O surgimento do MAS-IPSP na Bolívia como caso de luta partidária por reconhecimento

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Abstract

This article analyzes the emergence of Bolivia's MAS-IPSP as an emblematic example of a "partisan struggle for recognition". Drawing on theories of recognition, it draws upon under-explored conceptual elements to understand the formation of a political party as a qualitative leap in the process of the struggle for recognition. The case of the MAS, rooted in the 1995 *Asamblea por la Soberanía de los Pueblos* and the idea of "Political Instrument", illustrates how a peasant-indigenous movement transforms diffuse social engagement into a struggle for state power, confronting colonialism, neoliberalism, and political fragmentation. Through historical analysis using primary documents, it demonstrates that the party emerges as an arena for normative repair and a bond of mutual recognition, enabling political self-determination of grassroots. It contributes to the literatures on the party formation of movements in Latin America and on reconfigurations of political modernity, highlighting the potential of recognition to explain the associative, subjectivizing, and contestatory dynamics of new party formations.

Keywords: Latin American political modernity; MAS-IPSP; Party Formation; Recognition Theory.

Resumo

O artigo analisa o surgimento do MAS-IPSP boliviano como exemplo emblemático de "luta partidária por reconhecimento". Partindo das teorias do reconhecimento, recupera elementos conceituais pouco explorados para compreender a construção partidária como um salto qualitativo no processo de luta por reconhecimento. O caso do MAS, enraizado na *Asamblea por la Soberanía de los Pueblos* de 1995 e na ideia de "Instrumento Político", ilustra como um movimento campesino-indígena transforma o engajamento social difuso em disputa por poder estatal, enfrentando o colonialismo, o neoliberalismo e a fragmentação política. Através de análise histórica com documentos primários, demonstra que o partido emerge como arena de reparação normativa e laço de reconhecimento mútuo, permitindo a autodeterminação política das bases. Contribui para a literatura sobre partidização de movimentos na América Latina e para o debate sobre reconfigurações da modernidade política, destacando o potencial do reconhecimento para explicar dinâmicas associativas, subjetivadoras e contestatórias de novas formações partidárias.

Palavras-chave: MAS-IPSP; Modernidade política latino-americana; Partidarização; Teoria do reconhecimento.



1. Introduction

Latin American political modernity has been undergoing profound reconfigurations in recent decades. New lines of conflict – ranging from financialization to platformization, from the decentralization of communities to socio-ecological struggles – challenge traditional forms of political organization and demand new institutions and imaginaries of emancipation (Domingues, 2009). In this scenario, one of the most significant phenomena is the emergence of actors who transition from social movements to the party arena, creating hybrid forms of organization that strain both the state and the very structures of political representation

It is in this context that theories of recognition gain analytical relevance. Authors such as Taylor (2000), Honneth (2015), and Fraser (2022) have offered tools for understanding the dynamics of social conflict as “struggles for recognition”, marked by dimensions of subjectivation, socialization, and shared questioning. However, even when addressing collective groupings and networks, these approaches pay little attention to a classic form of struggle: the political party. At the same time, the specialized literature on parties continues to emphasize elitist and professional-electoral dimensions (Michels, 1982; Panebianco, 1990), but downplays their potential for contestation, subjectivation, and collective bonding. This gap becomes especially visible in light of new party formations that are also present in Latin America, such as the so-called “movement-parties”.

This article fills this gap by drawing on elements of the recognition paradigm to examine the moment of party-building – already highlighted in the literature as a defining feature of the movement’s entire organizational history (Panebianco, 1990) – understanding it as a qualitative leap in the struggle for recognition. The central hypothesis is that the formation of a party represents the transition to a contest for political-state power, transforming the collective engagement of a social movement into a quest for self-determined political decision-making capacity—a register of conflict that we conceptualize as the “partisan struggle for recognition”. The party, in this sense, becomes an arena of normative repair, and its bond a bond of recognition in politics.

To elaborate on this reflection, we combine a conceptual systematization (drawing on theories of the party and of recognition) with an emblematic case study of the reconfigurations of Latin American political modernity: the origins of the Bolivian



Movimiento al Socialismo – Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos [Movement for Socialism – Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples] (MAS-IPSP). Rooted in the 1995 *Asamblea por la Soberanía de los Pueblos Soberanía de los Pueblos* [Assembly for the Sovereignty of the Peoples] (ASP) and in the idea of the “*Instrumento Político* [Political Instrument]” (IP), MAS exemplifies how a peasant-indigenous movement, in a context of political crisis, neoliberalism, and ethnic-racial exclusion, transforms the struggle for recognition into a project of socio-state restructuring, achieving hegemony and consecutive presidential victories (Evo Morales). Our historical analysis, based on primary sources (congressional resolutions, organizational documents, and newspapers) and dialogue with existing research – some of which has already employed approaches to recognition (García Linera, 2004; Guimarães, 2014; Stefanoni, 2004; Urquidi, 2007), but without considering the particularities of the political-party dimension – allows us to demonstrate how party-building emerges as a concrete strategy of institutional capacities for the self-determined realization of recognition (“partisan struggle for recognition”).

The article is structured, in addition to this introduction and a conclusion, into three parts: a section that explores the potential of the intersection between theories of the party and of recognition; a section that discusses the MAS case, retrieving historical-contextual aspects of its formation and highlighting elements that help us understand the decision-making process behind the construction of a new political party; finally, a discussion of this moment of creation and its meanings. In this way, we contribute to (1) the literature that explores party organization in its plurality of motivations, meanings, and structures and (2) discussions on the dynamics of the struggle for recognition, highlighting the distinctive nature of the political-party leap.

2. Recognition and political parties: paths to a theoretical reflection

The modern idea of recognition has its own trajectory that refers, above all, to the reflections on “self-love [*amour propre*]” in Rousseau and the demand for “respect” for an equivalent human status in Kant. Fichte first properly introduced the term “recognition” as a philosophical concept [*Anerkennung*] to understand the formation of consciousness and law, but it is Hegel (2014, 2011, and 2010) who rearticulates it within



a more complex system, conceiving it as a triple entanglement of the dynamics of subjectivation, bonding, and struggle on the path to the self-realization of the free will in the world. These are some of the Hegelian reflections that have been revisited more recently by the paradigm of theories of recognition.

In the contemporary field, Taylor (2000) is the first to advance the connection between non-recognition and struggle¹, while Fraser (2022) offers a critical contribution by questioning a certain tendency in approaches to recognition (especially multiculturalism and communitarianism) to overlook the political-economic dimensions of conflict². But it is Honneth (2015) who presents a sophisticated analytical framework for thinking about social struggle³ – as Renault (2017) also argues – not only because of his revival of elements of Hegelian philosophy in the social sciences, but also because his elaboration (inspired by the historiographical approaches of E. P. Thompson and Barrington Moore Jr.) suggests a bridge between socio-subjective experiences of injury to recognition and collective struggle – thus introducing “the psych I link that leads from mere suffering to active action” (Honneth, 2015, p. 220). Thus, he uses tools from the social sciences to “reinterpret the notions of the struggle for recognition and modern ethical life in terms of contemporary historical and political issues” (Whitebook, 2017, p. 303). His theory proposes thinking of social conflicts in general as forms of “struggle for recognition”.

¹ For Taylor (2000), the construction of identity involves recognition, non-recognition, or “erroneous recognition” by the other, and a subject or group suffers a harmful “distortion” of its own image when it is socially presented with a “reductive, demeaning, or contemptible” portrayal of itself – a situation that takes on a “form of oppression” that imprisons identity. In turn, such harm would act as a “driving force” for the individual or group to mobilize in the demand to be recognized beyond the simulacrum. Thus, Taylor highlights the relevance of recognition in contemporary politics and views the “infringement” of recognition as a key driver of various social struggles, insofar as it represents a denial or distortion of the “identity” of the individual or group and, therefore, a harmful form of oppression. However, we highlight that reflections such as these tend to limit the potential of the idea of the “struggle for recognition” by proposing a direct link between it and the defense of cultural identities or personal integrity, engaging little with political-economic dimensions – in which both the importance of transforming these through the struggle and the mobilizing capacity of non-recognition stemming from exclusions in these dimensions are set aside.

² In her discussion, Fraser (2022) questions the way in which such paradigms favor an “identity politics” that sets aside fundamental elements of critical social demands – such as claims for social equality and the dimension of political economy in general – within a “post-socialist” position confined to liberal political horizons and lacking in anti-capitalist emancipatory projects. However, although this reflection draws due attention to broader political and socioeconomic problems, Fraser continues to directly link recognition and culture, while proposing an exaggerated conceptual separation between this realm and that of political economy (absent in the Hegelian paradigm).

³ This does not mean there are no criticisms of his work – which points, for example, to a deficit of negativity in his reworking of Hegel and in his own theories, given his tendencies to naturalize a cooperative conception of primary intersubjectivity, to excessively highlight (sometimes also naturalizing) subjective “identity”, and mitigating the negativity of recognition (Safatle, 2018; Whitebook, 2017).



In this sense, in his main argument, Honneth suggests grounding an entire analytical framework of social conflict on the idea that the experience of “disrespect” or “injury” represents “the affective motivational basis on which the struggle for recognition is anchored” (2015, p. 220). For the author, there is a claim to “identity” and “personal integrity” resulting from patterns or expectations of recognition that have been constructed intersubjectively – and that pertain to one’s affective bonds, one’s legal status, and the social value of one’s own way of life. But when such expectations are violated – that is, when there is a “denial or deprivation of recognition” (p. 214) – this is understood as damage to the “positive self-understanding” capable of “undermining the identity of the whole person”. In this sense, the challenge to non-recognition can be understood as a shared production among different “situations of subalternity” (Renault, 2017), underpinning a “general theory of social conflict” (Losurdo, 2015).

Such an experience has the potential to collectively engage individuals in political mobilizations of critique, but under two conditions: (1) the injury must be capable of producing a negative emotional reaction in the individual; and (2) feelings of injury must be articulated within an “intersubjective interpretive framework that validates them as typical of an entire group,” constructing a “collective semantics that allows for the interpretation of experiences of personal disappointment as something that affects not only the individual self but also a circle of many other subjects”⁴ (Honneth, 2015, p. 258). This leads to the dimension of the “collective struggle for recognition” (p. 259), framing the experience of injury as an “injustice” to be fought by the injured group.

There are three points worth highlighting regarding the development proposed by Honneth (2015) with this idea of the collectivization of struggles for recognition. First, collectivization is understood as a practical means of achieving broader relationships of recognition in society – a more efficient way to press for changes toward better conditions for ethical self-realization – an issue that touches on classic debates in social action. Second, the establishment of relations of recognition is not merely the goal of the struggle but also integral to its practical unfolding. This means that, through the process of collectivization, various individuals have the opportunity to come together and recognize

⁴ At this point, it is worth noting a connection between Honneth’s reflection and that of the classical party theorist Michels, for whom: “if an oppressed class has not managed to shake off this fatalism, if it has not become fully conscious of the social injustice that oppresses it, it is incapable of aspiring to emancipation. It is not the mere existence of oppressive conditions, but the perception of them by the oppressed that constitutes the inner cause of class struggles throughout history” (1982, p. 136).



one another in a shared struggle, thereby establishing a dynamic of association⁵. Third, it is through this collectivity that the subject seeks to reclaim the sense of “esteem” and “respect” that they perceive as lacking in their life: they see in the associative experience the possibility of acquiring “compensatory respect” (2013, p. 67) and to “see their needs, their capacity for judgment, and their various abilities confirmed in a lasting way through direct interactions” (p. 65) – that is, the possibility of establishing a positive self-relation, which operates as a secondary motivation for the struggle.

Indeed, Honneth (2015) deserves credit for linking, within a systematic framework, the Hegelian philosophy of recognition to social science analyses of sociopolitical mobilizations. But the idea that relations of recognition can operate within particular social collectives was not foreign to Hegel’s own reflections (2010), who had already discussed this issue when he elaborated on the “family,” the “corporation,” and even the “state” – which would share the same “ethical” foundation, characterized by the universalizing bond of mutual recognition.

Reflections such as those of Gramsci (2019) and Coutinho (1998) indicate that the Hegelian discussion of the corporation already anticipated theorizations regarding the dynamics of 20th-century workers’ associativism and the modern political-party system. Nevertheless, according to Losurdo (2015), it was Marx and Engels who directly introduced the connection between dynamics of recognition and political organization, bringing the political dimension of association to the center of the debate. In this sense, Losurdo highlights how the next stage of Marxist critique of the alienating, objectifying, and dehumanizing nature of the lack of recognition inherent in capitalist relations of production consists in understanding the transformative role of solidarity in a common struggle at the associative level: in the encounter fostered by relating to one another, the members of an “oppressed” and “slandered” class learn “to know themselves and shake off the discredit and self-discredit imposed by the ruling class,” thereby freeing themselves “from the guilt and consequent lack of self-esteem that the dominant ideology imposes upon them” (p. 116). The party thus appears not only as an instrument of struggle, but also as a space in which the dynamics of recognition operate and occupy

⁵ Honneth (2013) expands on this reflection by suggesting that group bonding allows for the construction of an alternative cultural community (or “counterculture”) with its own “norms of respect,” “symbols,” “rituals,” and “values” shared collectively, endowed with “symbiotic force” and capable of producing subjective experiences of “fusion” – in other words, a bond that is also collective subjectivation, the insertion of the self into the “we of common group life” (p. 77).



a fundamental political place – insofar as they engender processes of moral restitution and promote a more active and self-assured engagement.

Building on existing reflections in the field of recognition, therefore, it is possible to conceive of an interpretive paradigm that views the emergence of the party as a distinct moment in the collective struggle for recognition. To the extent that its construction is one of the forms taken by the associative dynamics of this struggle, a set of mutual recognition relations also operates within it, binding its members as parts of a political Whole – conceiving the party bond as a possible modality for the manifestation of the bond of recognition.

In the field of party theory, meanwhile, there are already discussions that draw connections with elements of recognition theories and highlight the contestatory, subjective, and relational potentials of party formations – thus encompassing the threefold interweaving of the concept of recognition as conceived by Hegel (subjectivation, binding, and struggle). Building on this, it is possible to point toward a path of reflection on the party as a structure for establishing relations of mutual recognition and as an instrument for the political advancement of struggles for recognition.

Classical and contemporary authors in Political Science (Duverger, 1970; Michels, 1982; Panebianco, 1990) and in Marxism in general (Lenin, 1979; Gramsci, 2019; Althusser, 2019; Dean, 2021; Žižek, 2011) have already discussed, in their own ways, the party as an agent of educational and consciousness-raising processes, capable of articulating feelings and desires in a political register and of forming new subjectivities (“subjectivizing”). The authors of this literature also show how the party can further be conceived as a political community (a “we” or “collective consciousness”) structured around associative dynamics, which even include their own rituals, language, and a shared political culture – a network through which dynamics of identity formation, experiences of belonging and community, and relationships of solidarity and camaraderie are cultivated. Thus, we see a common body of reflections shared by theories of recognition and of the party that allows us to characterize intra-party relations as well as relations of mutual recognition⁶ (which subjectivize and collectively bind those engaged).

⁶ In an interesting convergence with Honneth’s reflection (on the moral restitution provided by collective association), Michels (1982) goes so far as to suggest that it is through insertion into a political organization that socially marginalized subjects manage to regain their dignity – for “only by gathering together and giving their gathering a structure do the proletarians acquire the capacity for political resistance and, at the same



Considering the party's potential for contestation and critique, Marxism (Lenin, 1979; Gramsci, 2019; Althusser, 2018) tends to highlight the instrumental role of this political form in the struggle for the construction of socio-institutional reforms, revolutionary processes, and critical subjectivities, guided by the horizon of realizing a society free from capitalist domination. Political Science (Duverger, 1970; Michels, 1982; Panebianco, 1990; della Porta *et al.*, 2017; Anria, 2019; Tarrow, 2021), particularly when discussing mass parties and movement parties, highlights the party's capacity to echo political dissatisfaction, institutionally channel unmet social demands, and its potential to operate as a collective challenger of political exclusion. Thus, to the extent that we start from a paradigm that interprets the generality of social conflicts as dynamics of struggles for recognition, the reflections drawn upon allow us to move forward by glimpsing the possibility of conceiving the party as an element that operates within the same dimension as such struggles.

In the following section, we move on to historical investigation, guided by the theoretical discussion conducted. Our aim is to recover concrete elements that, beyond their own relevance, are capable of helping us link theories of the party and of recognition, enriching both through the concept of "partisan struggle for recognition" and its associated reflections.

3. The MAS-IPSP case: qualitative leap and political structuring of mutual recognition

Our discussion of the MAS-IPSP case focuses on the process by which the idea of the Political Instrument emerged within the Bolivian peasant-indigenous movement, taking into account contextual and conjunctural elements that define its spatio-temporal setting. This helps us situate the historical period in which progress was made on its design and practical implementation, above all to understand what was sought through this political construction (what were the justifications and reasons for its creation, what were its objectives, and what was expected of it at that time?). At the same time, the research allows us to visualize the organizational ideal associated with the IP, in order to

time, social dignity" (p. 15). It is through such a collective bond that subjects then become capable of enduring the "sufferings" imposed by society, finding solace in ties such as those of recognition – "the more or less explicit recognition [*Anerkennung*] and gratitude of their comrades are, in this case, sufficient solace" (p. 142).



understand what was seen as the distinguishing feature of this political construction in relation to others that already existed and which would also justify its creation. These are questions that help us consider to what extent such a political initiative actually represents a qualitative leap in the processes of the struggle for recognition, as well as what characteristics are associated with the structure of the IP and its political ties.

3.1. Foundational driving forces: the peasant-indigenous movement, coca growers, and the neoliberal period

The context in which the first discussions surrounding the IP in Bolivia emerged (which would culminate in the creation of the MAS-IPSP) is characterized by a set of specific socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors that have already been thoroughly examined in the literature (Anria, 2019; do Alto, 2011; Moya, 2016; Stefanoni, 2004; Van Cott, 2005; Yapur; Orellana; Romero, 2014; Zuazo, 2009). Given our objectives, we proceed by revisiting some of these reflections to highlight what we understand as the three main drivers of the process that led to the emergence of the IP idea and its creation, situating it historically.

The first driving force is the construction of the autonomous peasant-indigenous movement. The political project crystallized under the government of the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* [Nationalist Revolutionary Movement] (MNR) following the 1952 Revolution drove the building of a new union structure that positions the union as the central mediating instrument of the collective life of the peasant-indigenous movement⁷, both to create a channel for the transmission of popular demands and to build an alliance between the movement and the government and secure political support – within a dynamic of “subordinate dialogue” (Guimarães, 2014). Thus, even after the military coup led by General René Barrientos in 1964, the dependent relationship that had been established was not severed, but continued and even deepened through the Military-Peasant Pact – “designed as an institutional liaison structure between parastatal trade unionism and the army, to replace the union-party-state articulation in force during the MNR period” (Rivera, 2010, p. 170). But it was already in the late 1960s and early

⁷ This did not mean a uniform universalization of the union, as community structures already existed in different rural territories (especially *ayllus*). In practice, union-building was coordinated with local organizations, resulting in heterogeneous organizational models (Guimarães, 2014; Rivera, 2010).



1970s that the first attempts at autonomous reorganization began to emerge, the most significant of which was represented by “Indianism”⁸ in its “Katarist” strand⁹ (Hurtado, 1986). With the 1974 Tolata Massacre as a pivotal moment, the movement’s break with the government was marked by a tense and conflict-ridden process that culminated in the creation of the trade union federation *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* [Unified Trade Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia] (CSUTCB) in 1979.

The creation of the CSUTCB is recognized as a milestone in the affirmation of autonomous trade unionism in rural Bolivia (Stefanoni, 2004), the product of at least a decade of struggles by the Indianist-Katarist movement. From its founding, the federation already possessed a general political orientation, with the goal of building a political-union project specific to indigenous peasants (Yapur; Orellana; Romero, 2014) – which was initially associated with the struggle for the recovery and defense of land and territory¹⁰. The growing politicization of the CSUTCB culminated in the drafting of the important 1983 Political Thesis¹¹ and, subsequently, in the proposal for the “Political Instrument”.

The second driving force behind the IP is the emergence of the coca growers’ movement from the Cochabamba region: geographically distant from national political life, on the margins of the state, and largely unaffected by nationalist-revolutionary and indigenist sentiments, the coca growers advanced through their own union-based networks focused on immediate interests, yet also detached from the government-aligned union movement, forming collective networks capable of transforming isolated actions into a coordinated social movement (Guimarães, 2014; Rivera, 2010). Their

⁸ Two other currents were the initiatives of the *Bloque Independiente Campesino* [Independent Peasant Bloc] and the settlers of the tropical zones of Santa Cruz, Alto Beni, and Chapare (which culminated in the creation of the *Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia* [Bolivian Trade Union Confederation of Settlers]).

⁹ Katarism is a more reformist strand of Indianism – whose ideological-political expressions are diverse, ranging from conciliatory perspectives (with proposals for institutional participation, relations with “progressive” organizations, and class alliances for gradual change) to more radical ones (with insurrectionary horizons of liberating the “Indian nation” and the revolutionary construction of “Indian power” or the “Indian State”). The term “Katarism” refers to Tupak Katari, an Aymara leader who organized an armed siege of the city of La Paz in 1781 in the context of indigenous peoples’ resistance to colonial rule.

¹⁰ On the one hand, the struggle for “land” is more directly linked to the socioeconomic demands of the peasant movement. On the other hand, the struggle for “territory” also encompasses cultural elements of the communities’ way of life, representing a demand more directly linked to indigenous movements in defense of their identities.

¹¹ The document represents a milestone, as it was the product of a process of struggle and reflection by the Indigenist-Katarist movement in collaboration with the CSUTCB, which explicitly systematized and politicized the ethnic-racial dimension in connection with the peasant struggle, laying the groundwork for a new framework that came to serve as a reference for the movements (such as the paradigm of “unity in diversity”, the horizon of a unified struggle, notions of self-governance, and the idea of a “plurinational state”).



growth and politicization advanced in the 1980s as a reaction to the state's anti-coca repression, which adopted a policy of severe criminalization under pressure from the United States as part of its "war on drugs" agenda. Especially after the 1988 Villa Tunari Massacre, coca growers organized more actively for community self-defense (generating greater cohesion and unity) and developed a critical discourse against the state, particularly regarding violence, rights violations, external imperialist intervention, and in defense of national sovereignty – which operates much like the "intersubjective interpretive framework" or "collective semantics" regarding experiences of "injustice" (violation of recognition) discussed by Honneth (2015).

In other words, it is a movement constituted by moments of confrontation and anti-state opposition (Urquidi, 2007) that situated the state as the central actor in community life (its antagonist), thereby bringing forth a horizon of institutional dispute as a means to advance in collective self-defense in every possible sphere – a case of a movement with a "manifest will to power" (p. 214). This perspective of resistance is increasingly expanded into a more far-reaching, proactive project, advocating for the movement's political integration to advance social critique from within the state itself, while simultaneously questioning its principles¹².

Finally, the third driving force behind the IP refers to conjunctural elements brought about by the neoliberal period¹³. The implementation of neoliberalism in Bolivia included a project of submission to the U.S. policy of criminalizing the coca leaf, which had the unintended effect of strengthening the coca growers' movement itself (Guimarães, 2014). In turn, the social consequences of neoliberalism were also significant: the socioeconomic crisis helped fuel criticism of the state and the policies implemented, while the dismantling of the mining union movement left an opening for the strengthening of the coca growers and facilitated their integration with workers marked

¹² In this sense, state conflicts operated as a fundamental factor in enabling coca growers' demands to transition from economic self-defense to a horizon of seizing power – or, in Gramscian terms, from the economic-corporate to the ethical-political moment (Gramsci, 2019).

¹³ Following the economic failure and social crisis that marked the first post-redemocratization government (led by Hernán Siles Zuazo of the UDP from 1982 to 1985), the 1985 presidential candidates began advocating a program guided by the principles of economic and social stabilization promoted by the Washington Consensus. In this vein, the newly elected government (led by Víctor Paz Estenssoro of the MNR) signed Supreme Decree No. 21060 on August 29, 1985, considered the first milestone of neoliberalism in Bolivia.



by a history of struggle and organization rooted in socialist and nationalist paradigms¹⁴ (Anria, 2019; Urquidi, 2007).

In addition, two other elements of the neoliberal era shaped the context in which the IP was established. First, decentralization reforms (notably the *Ley de Participación Popular* [Law of Popular Participation] and the 1994 constitutional reform): these advanced a process of municipalization, strengthened local democracy, and created multiple small single-member electoral districts, which allowed many indigenous peasants to elect their own representatives for the first time (Albó; Ticonas; Rojas, 1995) – creating a crucial institutional context for the horizon of political participation to take root in rural areas, as a favorable window of political opportunities presented itself. Second, the context of “Pacted Democracy”¹⁵, marked by a crisis of representation, dissatisfaction with the political system, and criticism of left-wing political organizations (seen as manipulating the peasant-indigenous population) – which allowed for a growing understanding of the need for the movement to create its own political organization in order to build a real democracy.

In summary, a set of political opportunities presented themselves to the peasant-indigenous movement in the Bolivian context of the 1980s and 1990s. The roots of the MAS-IPSP (the idea of the IP) thus emerge from a process of accumulating the movement’s experiences over the years in its quest for self-determination, which advanced to the political level amid a conjuncture of incentives for doing so – in which the coca growers’ horizon of struggle shifted, turning toward the quest to seize state power to realize their expectations of recognition. Above all, with the coca growers’ hegemony, an alternative political-party project was advanced¹⁶, understood as the articulation of

¹⁴ Miners represented the central force of the Bolivian labor movement, organized around the *Central Obrera Boliviana* [Bolivian Workers’ Central] (COB). The closure of state-owned mines during the neoliberal period led to the forced relocation of this segment, driving a new wave of migration to Cochabamba due to the economic appeal of coca leaf cultivation.

¹⁵ The term refers to the agreements and coalitions among the three main parties that took turns in government: the MNR (with Víctor Paz Estenssoro from 1985 to 1989 and Carlos Mesa from 2003 to 2005), the MIR (with Jaime Paz Zamora from 1989 to 1993), and the ADN (with Sánchez de Lozada from 1993 to 1997, Hugo Banzer from 1997 to 2001, Jorge Quiroga from 2001 to 2002, and Lozada again from 2002 to 2003).

¹⁶ It is important to note that partisan-democratic participation was not the only political proposal within the Bolivian peasant-indigenous movement. Even with the failure of the *Asamblea de Nacionalidades* [Assembly of Nationalities] (discussed below), a radical indigenous sector (primarily of Aymara peoples) continued to advocate for more insurgent proposals, while within the coca growers’ movement itself there were also discussions about armed struggle – abandoned out of fear that they would justify the establishment of a new dictatorship (Moya, 2016). The strength of the party project was rooted in the coca growers’ segment that was becoming hegemonic within the movement, further driven by the prospect of expanded alliances with other social groups (such as the traditional left, intellectuals, urban sectors, and the middle classes).



the movement's own desire for political autonomy, which would serve as a tool for its development and advancement at the political level.

3.2. The idea of a “Political Instrument”

The conception of the IP from which the MAS-IPSP originates dates directly back to the 1988 and 1989 congresses of the CSUTCB (Choque, 2016; Moya, 2016) – within the framework of what has been termed the search for “self-representation” or “representation of the self” in politics (do Alto, 2005; García Linera, 2004; Guimarães, 2014; Van Cott, 2000; Zuazo, 2009). But even before that, there were peasant-indigenous discussions¹⁷ regarding the need to advance the political struggle beyond trade unionism and the importance of articulating an alternative and independent political framework.

Dissatisfaction with Bolivian political life and the search for “real” political participation led Katarism, as early as the 1970s, to reflect on the possibility of a different tactical approach toward the movement's horizons of autonomy and social transformation. For this reason, in its first public document – the 1973 Tiwanaku Manifesto (CCTK *et al.*, 1973) – the proposal for its own political-party structure was introduced: the idea of a new peasant-indigenous party with electoral representation emerged as a necessity for the movement to advance in the realization of its demands. This proposal was not limited to mere rhetoric, as it spurred the creation of various parties, such as the *Movimiento Indio Tupac Katari* [Tupac Katari Indian Movement] (MITKA).

In its founding manifesto of 1978, MITKA described itself as a “political organization of ‘INDIAN’ essence and presence” and highlighted the way in which “the Indigenous person has always been the governed, but never the governing; the soldier, the domestic worker, but not the officer; the militant base of political parties, but not the leaders” (MITKA, 1978, p. 579). In the same year, MITKA also published an introductory text in the political forum of the newspaper *Presencia*¹⁸: in it, the group justified its founding “because, throughout the republic's history, there has been no political entity

¹⁷ General ideas of a “political instrument” were also developed within the Bolivian labor movement – initially with the country's first socialist party experiments and later within the COB (with the 1970 Socialist Thesis and, above all, the 1989 Chojlla Thesis) – but these did not gain much traction by the end of the 20th century. It is important to revisit discussions rooted specifically in the peasant-indigenous movement because it possesses its own dynamics and a relatively independent trajectory of politicization.

¹⁸ Expone: Movimiento Indio Tupaj Katari-MITKA. *Presencia*, May 23, 1978.



that expressed and represented the interests and aspirations of the indigenous peoples”. MITKA would thus result from the process of “modern political institutionalization of an ancient movement that began with the assassination of the Inca Atahualpa”, created as “a historical political response, like the cry of a wounded social body, like the cry of an oppressed people”.

Katarism thus represented a milestone for having advanced, for the first time, the idea and practice of indigenous self-representation (Van Cott, 2000), creating its own parties with electoral participation as a proposal to solve the sociopolitical problems experienced by indigenous peasants. Furthermore, it was also through this initiative that party and electoral politics were introduced into the repertoire of collective action of rural movements in Bolivia (Guimarães, 2014), through a horizon that would become central to peasants in the 1990s: the search for self-representation – which did not imply the replacement of one tactic of collective action with another, but rather signaled the construction of a “dual strategy” (Van Cott, 2004) that articulated independent party politics with social mobilization.

It is thus in the late 1980s and early 1990s, within the more immediate context of discussions and mobilizations surrounding the 500th anniversary of colonization, that the idea of an autonomous “political instrument” for the entire peasant-indigenous movement – initially presented in a generic and poorly defined manner – truly gained traction. As indicated by the research of Choque (2016) and Moya (2016), the origins of the IP concept from which the MAS-IPSP emerged can be traced more directly to two CSUTCB congresses (in 1988 and 1989). And it is no coincidence that this idea emerged from the main peasant union matrix, a unifying space marked in its history by the politicization of the movement’s demands and tactics, as well as by the process of building a “‘counterpower’ that gave way to reflection and deliberation on central issues of national life (political situation, the State, power, democracy, sovereignty, etc.)” (Yapur; Orellana; Romero, 2014, p. 72).

The 1988 congress in Potosí took place against a backdrop of internal crisis and fragmentation within the CSUTCB. At that time, nine political documents were submitted by various organizations for analysis and deliberation by the newly created Political Commission of the CSUTCB (1989 [1988], pp. 265-425). Many of the issues raised showed a certain convergence, such as the critique of colonialism and imperialism, the defense of the value of indigenous cultures and communities, the importance of a unified struggle,



the urgency of deepening the response to the neoliberal advance, and dissatisfaction with the state of the labor movement. Recurring dissatisfaction with existing political organizations was also expressed, while at the same time highlighting the importance of building an alternative politics from the grassroots. The practical paths suggested for implementing a political initiative, however, varied: some proposed the defense of armed struggle and the insurrectionary path, others suggested strengthening the already existing trade union organizations, while a third segment pointed to the need to strengthen indigenous authorities and the power of local communities. It is in two of the proposals presented at this congress that the first mentions of a “political instrument” for rural movements appear: the proposal from the *Eje Comunero* [Commoner Axis] and that of the *Movimiento Campesino de Bases* [Grassroots Peasant Movement]. In this regard, the *Eje Comunero* document highlighted the need to “raise ourselves to the level of political struggle” as one of the movements’ tasks – and continues:

As a new peasantry that has assimilated the experiences of the past and knows who the enemy is, we cannot limit ourselves to mere union struggle, leaving the field of political struggle in the hands of traffickers and opportunists [...] we must seek our active participation in that struggle, building together with the other oppressed and exploited classes a political instrument that can lead our people’s struggle to their definitive liberation (CSUTCB, 1989 [1988], p. 323).

The document from the *Movimiento Campesino de Bases* was successful at the CSUTCB congress and deserves special mention for this reason as well, given that it was the movement’s theses that were adopted with collective legitimacy. The text begins by identifying self-criticism as one of the necessary pillars for the congress and proceeds with a diagnostic overview of the problems faced by communities in their relationship with the unions, concluding that there is a crisis linked to the movement’s lack of unity. The solution would require strengthening the communities, as it is suggested that unity can only begin to be built through their coordination. And this would still be a political solution insofar as unity is understood as a necessary element for the construction of “communal power” and, therefore, for “advancing on the path of seizing power for the people” (CSUTCB, 1989 [1988], p. 279). In this sense, after defending the necessity of the struggle for communal power as the first step toward reclaiming land, territory, and national identity from oligarchic rule, the document asks:

And what have we done so far to make this possible? Very little. But we believe that the union structure can also promote concrete tasks in this regard. The CSUTCB must organize an Assembly of Nationalities. It must call



for the formation of such a body where we can discuss the tasks we must carry out to forge the political instruments of the nationalities (CSUTCB, 1989 [1988], p. 275).

Neither document explains in greater detail what these “political instruments” would entail. Still, it is possible to understand that, with the introduction of this idea, an understanding was being articulated that the movement needed to advance in building its own tools to organize its political action autonomously from the grassroots – including, above all, in its conception of politics, the construction of “communal power” and a horizon of social “liberation”. Thus, a more precise framework was proposed, pointing to the need for advances in the struggle at the political level – which, according to García Linera (2004), demonstrates a process of growing political maturation among classes that, frustrated with existing formal participation mechanisms (“traditional parties”), are becoming more aware of the political possibilities afforded by internal cohesion.

As Choque (2016) and Moya (2016) suggest, the 1988 congress marked the beginning of a period of national discussions on the creation of a political instrument of their own. This was initially conceived in connection with the proposal for the *Asamblea de Nacionalidades* [Assembly of Nationalities]: a project for a para-state body superior to the CSUTCB itself, which would be composed of representatives of the various indigenous peoples seeking self-determination through autonomous processes of deliberation, decision-making, and implementation. This proposal followed its own path of development within a framework of dual power, advancing until its failed attempt at implementation on October 12, 1992 – after which the IP project came to take precedence (Choque, 2016; Yapur; Orellana; Romero, 2014).

Following the emergence of the IP concept in 1988, the discussion matured and took shape at the 1989 congress in Tarija, which focused on two issues: the sense of discrimination and political exclusion; and the need for electoral participation with their own representatives to make political decisions (Yapur; Orellana; Romero, 2014). This marked the first time that theses specifically related to the IP were approved, representing a milestone for “peasant subjectivity” as the push to seize state power began (Choque, 2016). Building on these discussions, an expanded meeting of the CSUTCB was held on January 18, 1991, in La Paz, which approved the new Political Resolution regarding the IP. It was considered that the main collective demands – territory, self-government, cultural strengthening, and defense of natural resources – “are political in nature because they challenge the power of the bourgeoisie”, which is why “we cannot limit ourselves to



a union-based struggle for demands; we must also wage the battle in the political arena by ousting the bosses' parties" (CSUTCB, 1991). The document then lists three points in its resolution: first, the objective of "putting into practice" the resolution approved at the 1989 congress; second, "building our own political instrument to implement the previous point"; and third:

For this political instrument to be a true alternative, it is resolved not to establish it through top-down decision-making, but rather to take this proposal to the grassroots so that, in a democratic and conscious manner, it is the communities themselves that initiate the construction of our own political instrument. This does not mean that the CSUTCB will become a political party, but rather that the CSUTCB will promote the construction of a political instrument from the grassroots up (CSUTCB, 1991).

The adoption of the IP's theses by the main peasant-indigenous trade union federation spread the idea that entering the political arena was necessary, placing it at the center of the movement's agenda – in which regional unions played an indispensable role in giving substance to the project and advancing collective politicization (Choque, 2015). In other words, the commitment to seizing state power through a distinct political framework of their own (rooted at the grassroots) began to spread – thus expanding their paradigm of struggle, which now encompasses the conquest of the capacity for self-determined institutional decision-making to enable the realization of expectations for recognition. Beyond the social demands constituting the movement, the content of recognition implied in this perspective would also involve a demand for self-determination and political agency, such as the quest to be recognized as a political actor – engaged in steering the decision-making processes that influence social and state trajectories. It is through this dynamic that the movement advanced in its own construction as a political subject.

The IP's proposal gradually permeated the "peasant imagination" until it became a new "political grammar" (Yapur; Orellana; Romero, 2014, p. 78), first brought to fruition in the *Asamblea por la Soberanía de los Pueblos*. The fundamental difference between the IP and other parties of the period lies in its existence as a political-electoral extension of social movements (García Linera, 2004), rooted in a base of various pre-existing social groups (primarily rural unions) – thus following a "bottom-up" organizational model (Anria, 2019) through a hybrid fusion of established social networks, similar to European



social democratic experiences (such as the British one)¹⁹. This process of party-building through the political coordination of existing organizations and those outside parliament also allows us to draw parallels between the IP and parties characterized by “indirect structure”²⁰, “external creation”²¹ (Duverger, 1970), and “external legitimation”²² (Panebianco, 1990).

4. Recognition and institutional political contestation: the official creation of the IP

The moment considered to mark the official establishment of the Political Instrument (from which the subsequent development of the MAS-IPSP would proceed) is represented by the First Congress of Territory and Political Instrument in 1995 (Choque, 2016; Moya, 2016) – which, following prior approval at the 6th Congress of the CSUTCB (1994), established the first concrete manifestation of the IP: the *Asamblea por la Soberanía de los Pueblos* (initially a regional political organization in Cochabamba). The congress represents the culmination of a laborious process of politicization within the peasant-indigenous regions and federations, which internalized, reproduced, and strengthened the IP project over the years (Choque, 2015). It remains relevant because much of the actions and discourse carried out by the MAS in later periods finds its roots in the characteristics defended and embraced by the party during this initial period (Anria, 2019; Gomes, 2016) – thus reaffirming Panebianco’s (1990) thesis regarding the impacts of a party’s origins throughout its entire organizational history.

The congress took place in Santa Cruz from March 24 to 28, 1995. Around 1,500 delegates from different federations (regional, departmental, and national) across the

¹⁹ Although with a significant territorial difference.

²⁰ Taking the origins of the British Labour Party in 1900 as a reference, Duverger describes a party with an “indirect structure” (or “indirect party”) as follows: “composed of trade unions, cooperatives, mutual aid societies, and intellectual groups, which came together to establish a common electoral organization: there were no party supporters, no party members, but only supporters of ‘grassroots groups,’ members of trade unions, cooperatives, mutual societies (or mutual aid societies), etc.” (1970, p. 40). According to the author, such a structure would be more exceptional in the history of modern parties of the early 20th century, which tend to exist, on the other hand, through a “direct structure” – in which “the supporters themselves form the party community, without the intermediation of other social groups” (p. 41).

²¹ Parties originating outside of parliament, that is, not resulting from the breakdown of alliances or internal divisions within representative institutions (Duverger, 1970).

²² According to Panebianco, a party with “external legitimacy” is one whose origins involve “an external institution that ‘sponsors’ its creation”: “If there is an external institution, the party is created and conceived as the ‘political arm’ of that institution” (1990, p. 112).



country participated in it²³, affirming the construction of a political extension of the trade union organizations – a proposal that was not the only one to emerge from the peasant movement, but which was driven above all by a coca-growing faction that became hegemonic. According to Stefanoni, the foundations of the IP from the outset were not based on ideas of revolutionary self-government or “indigenous power”, but on a less radical form of Indianism, which sought “to achieve recognition of the indigenous within the Bolivian state” (2004, p. 23) and to advance social change through institutional participation.

The congress resolutions were published at the initiative of the *Federación Sindical Única De Trabajadores Campesinos De Cochabamba* [Unified Trade Union Federation of Peasant Workers of Cochabamba] (FSUTCC) – whose theses prevailed – constituting a fundamental source for understanding the creation of the IP. Through them, we examined above all what was seen as unique and distinctive about its organizational character (non-existent or insufficient in the organizations of that time) and what would explain the need for its creation at that moment.

In our research, we identified what was presented as the justification for its establishment (why create the IP?), the objectives sought through this initiative (what is the IP aiming to achieve?), and the characteristics it should embody (what is the nature of the IP?). This led us to highlight the first section of the document, *Justificación y Declaración de Principios* [Justification and Declaration of Principles] (ASP, 1995, pp. 3-15) – which we discuss below following a thematic breakdown (justifications, objectives, and characteristics), aware that in practice all the arguments are part of a general justification for the creation of the IP.

A significant part of the aforementioned section is dedicated to presenting a diagnosis, which serves as a justification for the IP initiative. We have identified three central lines of argument that make up this diagnosis (in an overlapping manner): the critique of the colonial experience and its effects, the anti-imperialist critique of neoliberalism, and the rejection of the current political situation (the latter being

²³ Notably: CSUTCB, coca growers’ federations, the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa”* [“Bartolina Sisa” Bolivian National Confederation of Indigenous Peasant Women], the *Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia* [Bolivian Trade Union Confederation of Settlers], and the *Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano* [Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia]. The congress was also supported by the COB.



associated with the defense of the need for an alternative political approach, which also touches on the objectives sought through the IP).

Although this aspect is rarely mentioned explicitly, the critique of colonialism takes on particular importance insofar as it situates the IP's proposal within a broader historical and political context, drawing upon the "long-term memory" (Rivera, 2010) of social movements in their connection to the struggle of indigenous peoples. It is in this sense that we can understand statements such as "No man or woman with roots in our Andean-Amazonian culture should forget the 'civilizing experiments' to which we have been subjected as exploited peoples and classes for more than 500 years" (ASP, 1995, p. 5), or the introductory statement of the document: "As a result of 503 years of economic exploitation, social contempt, social discrimination, and cultural alienation, we, the children, have regained power and territory" (p. 3). Following reflections such as these, the creation of the IP is presented as resulting from the need to respond to the violence and subjugation perpetrated throughout colonial history through the recovery not only of territory but also of power – that is, the quest for power as a path to overcoming the wounds inflicted on collective recognition.

In turn, the critique of neoliberalism serves to mobilize issues experienced more immediately by the movements in their current context, with a particular emphasis on the rejection of the neoliberal state. Its anti-imperialist character stems precisely from the understanding that "the intent of the neoliberal model is for domestic and foreign oligarchic business leaders to take possession of our land and territory" (ASP, 1995, p. 7). It is from this perspective that, for example, the "relocation" of miners, the sale of "renewable and non-renewable" resources, the criminalization and attempted eradication of the coca leaf and "Andean-Amazonian culture", the control of the economy by "foreign capital", and the drive to dismantle popular organizations are denounced. The urgency of creating the IP in response to neoliberal offensives (with their tensions against popular demands for recognition) is put in the following terms, in a markedly defensive tone:

So that Bolivia does not continue to sink into corruption, let us forge our own Political Instrument at this very moment; if we do not do so now, the Neoliberal State and transnational corporations will destroy us, our ancestral roots, our communities, our union, the federations, the confederations, and the Bolivian Workers' Central. The lands, the territory, and our wealth will become the property of foreigners from Western culture. Bolivia will be reduced to a region dominated by transnational corporations and internal neo-bosses (ASP, 1995, p. 9).



The axis of rejection of the current political situation, on the other hand, was identified as the one most directly invoked in justifying the creation of the IP, especially given the problems in the relationship between the social base and existing political parties. It is in this sense that a kind of collective self-criticism is presented in two arguments. First: it is stated that “The greatest historical mistake of the Andean-Amazonian world, of the workers in the cities and mines, of our intellectuals, was to support and trust the parties of the ‘political class’” (ASP, 1995, p. 6), which is why it is argued that voting for these parties served to propel the neoliberal model in the country – “with our vote, we brought our enemies to power” (p. 7). Second: a persistent problem is identified of grassroots members being abandoned during election periods by activists who prioritize their parties, leaving them marginalized and without a clear sense of direction for their actions and votes. In other words, a political problem is identified insofar as (1) traditional parties uphold neoliberalism with interests alien to those of the grassroots and (2) the grassroots themselves ended up supporting this disparity through their votes. This leads to a crucial question: “we have never discussed how, or by what means, we can prevent our organizations from being marginalized during election periods” (ASP, 1995, p. 7).

It is important to highlight a relevant point in the proposed analysis: the need for greater unity among organizations, especially during election periods. To the extent that these organizations would be abandoned during this period, the analysis suggests that they are left to direct their votes according to directions that are not collectively coordinated among themselves. For this reason, the duty to “unite firmly” (ASP, 1995, p. 8) and the need to respond to the “urgency of strengthening cohesion with our parent organizations” (p. 9) – in other words, to mutually recognize one another as a distinct collective capable of self-determined political decision-making – are also identified as justifications for the creation of the IP. In turn, this point also echoes Duverger’s (1970) reflection on “externally created” parties, according to which these tend to seek greater central convergence, even while reproducing nuances of the organizational structures that drove their founding – as we see in the case of the ASP. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the possibility of considering a certain collective political subjectivation implied in a bond of recognition as a hallmark of this union necessary for party formation.



The construction of collective coordination is further understood by the ASP as necessary to prevent the neoliberal project from further consolidating and to ensure that the grassroots and their organizations participate effectively, in coordination, and with unity throughout the process. It is in these terms that the critique of existing politics is linked to the proposal for an alternative political construction:

The time has come to put an end to the betrayal of the parties of the “political class,” and the only way to do so is for the men and women of the Aymara, Quechua, and Guaraní nations, the people of the Chaco, and all those who make up the Amazon, the working class of the mines and cities, the intellectuals and those who believe in a society based on solidarity rather than individualism, who are aware that industrialism has not resolved the poverty and hunger of more than 80% of the world’s population, we must unite firmly behind our own political instrument. For the first time in our history, the poor of Bolivia, together with our intellectuals, will vote and forge our instrument, for the good of Bolivia and its children (ASP, 1995, p. 8).

All of this initial reasoning reinforces Panebianco’s (1990) argument that various “collective incentives” – solidarity, identity, and ideology – shape the internal dynamics of political parties, particularly in their early stages. This does not deny the possibility of the creation of an internal hierarchy that reproduces oligarchization – within the framework of Michels (1982) – but it can be seen that, even with the eventual emergence of a system of inequalities that bring with them “selective incentives” (Panebianco, 1990) – power, status, and resources – there is a collective convergence or at least a shared sense of belonging (through mutual recognition in the struggle) that is created and fostered by the party as part of its foundations over time. Thus, within this dimension, we identify incentives of recognition as fundamental aggregators and mobilizers for party-building – in which the theory of recognition helps us deepen Panebianco’s reflection.

We then turn to the objectives pursued through the IP – which are still considered foundational justifications but refer more directly to what was intended to be achieved: a distinct political construction, rooted in the peasant-indigenous organizational network, capable of serving the contest for state power. In this sense, after praising the mobilizations that began on October 12, 1992, in the face of the 500th anniversary of colonization, the ASP document indicates that this “movement of the peoples made the heart of each one of us beat faster, in the perspective that the time was approaching to reconstruct our history and our own current society [...] starting from ourselves, from our IDENTITY and HISTORY” (ASP, 1995, p. 3). The IP’s proposal is referred to as a direct heir to this trajectory of self-determination, in addition to the accumulation of various



initiatives: the 4th CSUTCB Congress (1989), the March for Territory and Dignity (1990), the March for Life (1986), and the March for Coca, Territory, and National Sovereignty (1994) – which recovers the memory of these movements and, at the same time, reinforces the intrinsic value of their initiatives. This leads to the following political aspiration:

The experience of playing a leading role in the trenches of struggle has taught us that the only way to overcome the poisonous web of the current corrupt economic-political system is to enter the political arena, but to enter, no longer under the political leadership of one or two intellectuals from the great or small oligarchy, with a Yankee colonialist or Europeanized mindset, but to enter from the grassroots, from the indigenous nations, and to work for the grassroots, the indigenous nations, and the popular movement as a whole (ASP, 1995, p. 4).

The aim was to find a way to enter the political system through an organization founded on the social grassroots themselves, thus breaking with delegationist perspectives in favor of an initiative of political protagonism by groups that had until then been subalternized. It is about building a tool that would allow the grassroots to act politically on their own terms, an instrument of their own capable of giving continuity to and serving their struggle in the political arena. We thus identify a fundamental difference in the struggle for recognition by the peasant-indigenous movement, in that there is a perceived need to contest state power to realize expectations of recognition directly through their own political organization, and no longer through the delegation of political initiative. This organization, in turn, would be significant because it embodies the desire for political autonomy and enables the practical construction and advancement of this autonomy within the collective sphere, driving the struggle at the political-institutional level.

Entry into politics through the IP is understood from at least two overlapping perspectives in the document. On the one hand, it means that the goal becomes the reconstruction of social reality, political representation, and democracy through the conquest of state power by the movements – “a government of workers from the countryside and the cities, from the Amazon and the Andes, to bring about a multinational, communal, and socialist state, based on authentic democracy” (ASP, 1995, p. 12). On the other hand, entering politics also takes on the meaning of “structuring the party of the poor to confront the parties of the rich on the electoral stage” (p. 11). In summary, the need to move into politics is thus understood:



Until now, we have fought the neoliberal state from within the labor movement, the time has come to do so also from the political arena and on the tactical electoral front, with the ultimate goal of restoring democracy for Bolivia's poor. History has already shown us the way, we must transform our social movement into a powerful political movement; this transformation consists of having our own instrument of political struggle; our future electoral victories are intertwined with our future strategic political victories (ASP, 1995, p. 11).

In other words, the construction of the IP is guided by the understanding, at that moment, of a necessary transition from the trade union sphere to the political sphere – the “transformation” of the social movement into a political movement—which do Alto classifies as a “framework transformation” (2005, p. 7): an operation of meaning-making through collective action (“framing”) that seeks to construct and justify new values and practices in opposition to existing ones. In its strategic aspect, this means that a horizon of seizing state power for social change (“rescuing democracy for the poor”) enters the collective agenda, while in its tactical aspect it signifies the desire to participate institutionally through one's own organization. In this sense, what seems to explain the creation of the IP most directly is a tactical shift within the movements situated within a process of strategic deepening²⁴ – which occurs, as we have seen, within a context that provided a set of political opportunities and incentives for this – rather than a disciplined ideological-organizational effort (unlike other parties of the Latin American left)²⁵.

In addition to this primary objective, the document also outlines other goals that would be achieved through the creation of the IP. For example, because it is built from the grassroots up, it was emphasized that this instrument is the means “for our participation to be effective and forceful” (ASP, 1995, p. 11), and it is also what will make it possible to combat systemic corruption – “the bastion of honesty, against corruption and theft. It will be and is the embodiment of ethics and morality” (p. 8) – a promise of anti-systemic integrity that defines the political discourse of the future MAS (Gomes, 2016). In another argument, it was indicated that the IP has as its “main objective the recovery of the Territory” (ASP, 1995, p. 5), thus conferring upon it a markedly defensive

²⁴ We say “deepening” because the novelty lies not in the horizon of social transformation (which already existed) but in the understanding that, to achieve it, it proved necessary to also aim for the conquest of state power by the grassroots and their organizational networks.

²⁵ In fact, much of the ideological diversity and breadth (without many syntheses in a defined program) assumed by the MAS-IPSP later on can be traced back to this character of the IP's formation – in which it is again worth recalling Panebianco's thesis (1990).



character – similar to what is suggested in the argument for defense against neoliberalism.

Finally, the document also presents elements characterizing the IP that are relevant in helping us understand what was envisioned as its structure and distinct identity – and which, at the same time, serve as the basis for the justifications for its creation. In this sense, what immediately stands out is the presentation of who would be those who would build and sustain the IP: the “peasant movement, the indigenous nations, the labor movement, and the oppressed people as a whole,” in addition to “intellectuals” committed to the “profound restructuring of the economic-political system”. Therefore, it is the “Political Instrument of the poor and exploited, of the marginalized, of the indigenous peoples and nations” (ASP, 1995, pp. 4-5). These groups would not merely be those who delegate the capacity for action and decision-making through the vote, but rather the very protagonists of the political struggle – as highlighted by the following “basic principle”:

Under no circumstances will our Political Instrument be a copy of the parties of the ‘political class’; its defining feature is that our Political Instrument arises from the very heart of our grassroots organizations. Without this foundation, it is impossible to forge such an instrument; within our grassroots organizations, we must be convinced of this historical necessity (ASP, 1995, p. 9).

Thus, we see the description of a fundamental distinction between parties of the “political class” and the IP, a difference that pertains above all to its roots in the social base (as a political extension of trade union-community organizations) within the horizon of building an autonomous political organization of the peasant-indigenous movement – an argument that also helps explain the insistence on not originally calling it a “party”²⁶. In other words, it is by taking traditional parties and their characteristics as “counterexamples” that one reflects on the organizational ideal of the IP’s own formation (do Alto, 2005, p. 5).

²⁶ At least two elements must be considered to understand this issue: 1) the IP’s thesis is embedded in a tradition of “superiority of the union over the party” (Stefanoni, 2004, p. 23) that marks the history of Bolivian popular movements; and 2) the party tends to be understood by Bolivian peasant-indigenous movements as a “tool of domination”, due to its historical tendency to alienate them from the possibilities of substantive representation (do Alto, 2005), and also as an institution that divides social forces rather than unifying them (Anria, 2019). As Zuazo summarizes: “The idea of forming something other than a party has two foundations: on the one hand, it is the product of the democratic experience developed by the peasant-indigenous world, having observed in various elections that ‘the parties divide us.’ On the other hand, this need to create something other than a party is a response to the crisis of legitimacy among parties that has also reached rural areas” (2009, p. 38).



We then move forward by presenting another “central principle”:

we recognize and are part of the struggle waged by the working class, the millennia-old struggle of our nations and indigenous peoples, maintaining and linking these historical struggles is our mission and daily duty: Our Political Instrument must faithfully express this (ASP, 1995, p. 10).

Therefore, the IP would exist as a common space for encounter and connection among different movements and struggles – much like a “party community” (Duverger, 1970), marked by internal relations of mutual recognition among subjects who are collectively bound by political engagement. For this very reason, it is understood that there should be no room within it for diverse identities to operate as segregatory mechanisms: the document emphasizes that rural and urban workers do not thereby lose their “cultural identity and native roots,” which is why it presents the “basic principle” according to which “we do not accept an artificial division between the working class and the native” (ASP, 1995, p. 9). We understand that this is also a way of suggesting the importance of conceiving a shared plan of existence among those who make up the IP (in this case, linked to their “original roots”) – which only reinforces the understanding of its character as a common associative space, of the party bond as a bond of recognition in a shared political struggle.

The history of the emergence of MAS-IPSP (through ASP), ultimately, underscores the possibilities and potential inherent in the intersection of theories of recognition and political parties by demonstrating the role of the latter in not only channeling political representation but also reinforcing dynamics of belonging, identity-building, and the consolidation of memories and ancestral roots. This relationship, as we have seen, is present throughout the decision-making process involved in transforming a social struggle – through movements, communities, and unions – into a political struggle for institutional power.

5. Concluding remarks

Contemporary reconfigurations of Latin American political modernity are revealed, to a large extent, in the emergence of new institutional forms that link deep social conflicts to projects of state transformation. The case of Bolivia’s MAS clearly illustrates this dynamic: emerging from the ASP in 1995, the “Political Instrument” represented a qualitative leap



in the struggle for recognition of a peasant-indigenous movement that simultaneously faced colonial continuity, the threats of imperialist neoliberalism, and internal political fragmentation.

We identified, in the explicit justifications for the creation of the IP, the need to respond to these three fronts: the colonial legacy and its continuities, the neoliberal advance, and the movement's lack of unity. As for the objectives pursued, the idea of advancing institutional political participation stood out, with a view to the social base's conquest of state power, transforming diffuse engagement into self-determined institutional capacity. Finally, the characteristics associated with the IP – its grassroots roots and unifying function – point to an understanding of the party not merely as an electoral machine, but as a space of shared existence and a bond of mutual recognition in politics.

In this sense, the process of building the IP introduced a principle of qualitative change in the dynamics of the struggle for recognition: by opting for party formation, the movement expanded its horizon of autonomous and self-determined existence (which had been cultivated for years) into the political-state sphere. In this sense, going beyond the logic of conflict typically understood by theories of recognition – of a group that pressures the state from the outside to expand recognition – the case analyzed here shows us the experience of a group that, in its struggle, begins to seek direct means of institutional decision-making to take the lead itself in the realization of its recognition. The party thus emerges with the potential to operate as an instrument of normative repair, for the self-determined realization of recognition – an enriching characterization of the referenced theoretical field, which rarely discusses its role in struggles for recognition.

In fact, as the FSUTCC's presentation to the ASP resolutions makes clear, the coca growers themselves already interpreted the initiative as a "qualitative leap in the leadership of the parent peasant organization", insofar as it put into practice for the first time a central objective of the CSUTCB: "to raise political consciousness for the peasant seizure of power" (ASP, 1995, p. 1). The construction of the party thus appears as the materialization of the desire for political autonomy and the demand to be recognized as a political subject, a protagonist in self-determined processes of institutional decision-making, within the framework of a "partisan struggle for recognition".



Furthermore, the organizational ideal associated with the IP implies an understanding of the party as a space of shared existence in politics, a unity capable of linking the multiplicity of subjects, struggles, and demands under a shared horizon of institutional contestation. In this sense, Guimarães (2014) goes so far as to discuss the bond established among peasant-indigenous people in struggle as bonds of mutual recognition when speaking of the tactics of blockades and marches – which operate not only as acts of protest but also strengthen “the cohesion of the movement, for by fostering recognition among its participants as ‘brothers’ and ‘equals,’ they enabled greater solidarity” (p. 294). We suggest, then, the possibility of following similar paths to understand the political-partisan bond created through the IP as also a bond of mutual recognition, linking those engaged in a politically oriented process of collective subjectivation. With this, we identify recognition as part of the collective incentives (Panebianco, 1990) that serve as aggregators and stimulate the creation of and engagement with the party – that is, incentives of recognition as constitutive features of the party, promoting adherence and allowing it to operate in a restorative manner also through its bond.

The party thus emerges as a potential tool for the political structuring of claims and expectations of recognition, simultaneously providing spaces for the mutual recognition of those engaged as parts belonging to a Whole that channels strength to fight for state power, articulating itself in a defined political direction – a collective political “will” (Gramsci, 2019; Lenin, 1979; Michels, 1982), a political “we” (Dean, 2021; Honneth, 2013), capable even of restoring compensatory recognition through collective bonding (Losurdo, 2015). The party, in this way, would be able to interconnect social forces, boosting self-esteem and fostering new positive self-relationships, as well as promoting the connection and continuity of the struggle for recognition at the political level – a perspective of political unification of social multiplicity that, as we have seen, was understood by the peasant-indigenous movement itself as necessary for the advancement of the struggle, in its desire to create an organization capable of uniting and directing demands toward a defined, rather than scattered, political direction.

Thus, the MAS exemplifies how, in Latin America, the struggle for recognition can transition from the social movement to state restructuring, generating new institutional configurations that challenge the hegemonic imaginary. Although it is necessary to monitor the tensions between the IP’s organizational ideal and the electoral and



institutional paths adopted, what this research allows us to visualize are the potentials of the recognition paradigm for understanding the associative, subjectivizing, and contestatory dimensions of parties originating from movements. By highlighting the party as a bond of mutual recognition in politics and as a qualitative leap in the struggle for recognition, we contribute to thinking about the reconfigurations of Latin American political modernity not only as a crisis, but also as the opening of new horizons of emancipation.

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