



HERNÁN M. PALERMO

ORCID

Centro de Estudios e
Investigaciones Laborales
(CEIL-CONICET-Argentina)
hernanpalermo@gmail.com

PATRICIA VENTRICI

ORCID

Centro de Estudios e
Investigaciones Laborales
(CEIL-CONICET-Argentina)
patriciaventrici@gmail.com

ROCÍO SANTARCIERI

ORCID

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Universidad de Buenos Aires
(FFyL-UBA-Argentina)
rociosantar@gmail.com

RECEIVED

June 2, 2021

APPROVED

October 25, 2022

PUBLISHED

December 13, 2022

TRANSLATION
OF SUMMARY

Rocío Santarcieri

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Universidad de Buenos Aires
(FFyL-UBA-Argentina)



COPE



Technoprogressive neoliberalism and its alternatives: the case of Mercado Libre and the organization Transistemas¹

ABSTRACT: This article aims to ascertain the meanings and values established in the corporate agenda of Mercado Libre, the leader in e-commerce in Latin America. Starting from a systematic survey of its appearances in the media and social networks, we address the meanings of inclusion and the imaginary of the future that it promotes as a technology-intensive company. The techno-inclusive agenda proposed by technoprogressive neoliberalism feeds on the demands of the new social movements to revitalize the idea of a hyper-individualized entrepreneurial subject and position technological innovation as the center of social well-being. Likewise, we include the activist experience of Transistemas, a LGBTQ+ social organization that generates proposals for formal labor insertion in the computer industry. Considering these two cases, we attempt to analyze the tension between the technoprogressive neoliberal hegemonic agenda and the resignifications that are produced on it from grassroots political activism.

KEYWORDS: Corporate agenda; technology; inclusion; political activism; entrepreneurship.

Neoliberalismo tecnoprogresista y sus alternativas: el caso de Mercado Libre y la organización Transistemas

RESUMEN: El presente artículo indaga sobre los sentidos y valores que instala la agenda empresarial de Mercado Libre, la líder en e-commerce de Latinoamérica. Partiendo de un relevamiento sistemático de sus apariciones en medios de comunicación y redes sociales, abordamos las significaciones sobre la inclusión y los imaginarios de futuro que promueve como empresa de uso intensivo de tecnología. La agenda tecno-inclusiva que propone el neoliberalismo tecnoprogresista se nutre de reivindicaciones de los nuevos movimientos sociales para revitalizar la idea de sujeto emprendedor hiperindividualizado y posicionar a la innovación tecnológica como centro del bienestar social. Asimismo, tomamos la experiencia activista de Transistemas, una organización social integrada por personas del colectivo LGBTQ+ que genera propuestas para la inserción laboral formal en la industria informática. Tomando estos dos casos analizamos la tensión entre la agenda hegemónica neoliberal tecnoprogresista y las resignificaciones que se producen sobre ella a partir del activismo político de base.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Agenda empresarial; tecnología; inclusión; activismo político; emprendedurismo.

HOW TO QUOTE

Palermo, H.; Ventrici P. y Santarcieri R. (2022). Technoprogressive neoliberalism and its alternatives: the case of Mercado Libre and the organization Transistemas. *Culturales*, 10, e696. <https://doi.org/10.22234/requ.20221001.e696>

¹ This document is the result of funding granted by the National Government; therefore, it is subject to compliance with Law No. 26,899. Funding Agency: National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET). Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The reduction of equality to meritocracy was especially fatal. The progressive neoliberal program to achieve a just order of status did not aim to abolish social hierarchy, but to “diversify” it by empowering talented women, people of color and members of sexual minorities to rise to the top...it aims to ensure that meritorious individuals from overrepresented groups can attain positions and pay like those of white heterosexual males of their own class (Fraser, 2019, p. 30).

Introduction

In the current context of capitalism, technological mega-corporations are positioned as indisputable protagonists of the overwhelming process of digitalization of existence that we are experiencing (Sadin, 2020; 2018). Their impact on the shaping of our society can be analyzed by focusing on various aspects. In this article we focus on one of them: the analysis on the meanings and values promoted by the discourse of large technological corporations, emphasizing the political functionality that in this symbolic operation has the recognition of diversities founded on the main slogans of global social movements such as feminism and the claims of LGTBQ+ organizations.

To address this issue, we mainly focus on two opposite cases. First, we analyze the corporate discourse of Mercado Libre,² an Argentinian company leader in e-commerce in Latin America. We consider this to be an emblematic case of how the techno-inclusive agenda proposed by technoprogressive neoliberalism feeds on the claims of the new social movements to revitalize the idea of the hyper-individualized entrepreneurial subject and position technological innovation as the center of social well-being. It is a paradigmatic example of how this new entrepreneurial subject, inspired in its conception by the maximums of the spirit of Silicon Valley and protagonist of the platform economy (Srnicek, 2018) deploys a progressive agenda in which historical demands of feminist struggles such as included the diversity, women’s empowerment, the rights of the LGTBQ+ community, added to anti-racism as well. The ideals of diversity and individual freedom are revitalized

² Mercado Libre is a high-tech, transnational company that emerged in 1999 in Argentina, founded by Marcos Galperin. Based on e-commerce, over the years of growth it developed a series of complementary facets that gave rise to what the company calls the “Mercado Libre ecosystem”. The two main core areas are commerce (marketplace) and electronic finance (fintech), represented by its most emblematic firms: Mercado Libre and Mercado Pago. They are complemented by the development of advertising business units (Mercado Adds), logistics (Mercado Envíos) and online store sales (Mercado Shops). In Latin America, Mercado Libre is the first Argentine unicorn (due to its valuation of more than one billion dollars in the NASDAQ) par excellence and is the leader in e-commerce in the region. Like the rest of the large platform companies, it arose because of the fruitful encounter between financial capital and highly qualified cognitive work.

in this symbolic scaffolding with a new patina in keeping with the imaginary of the times. The recognition of individuality, freedom and personified singularity take center stage, or rather, they are at the heart of the political-cultural project embodied by these new corporate subjects.

In this sense, the thesis of this article is that the notion of the entrepreneurial subject, the heart of the technoprogressive neoliberal project, is nourished by claims centered on the recognition of diversities and the empowerment of women; however, this symbolic operation, far from providing autonomy and empowerment, ends up reinforcing oppression. Nonetheless, some experiences of political activism retake the agenda of inclusion of diversities and the relationship with digital technologies, producing new meanings in the neoliberal technoprogressive agenda. An example of this is the experience of Transistemas, a social organization integrated by people from the LGTBQ+ collective that generates proposals for the formal labor incorporation of transvestites, trans and non-binary people in the systems industry. Taking these two extremes of the technological experience -Mercado Libre and Transistemas- this article aims to analyze the tension between the hegemonic neoliberal technoprogressive agenda and the construction of a neoliberal subject, and the resignifications that occur on that agenda from grassroots political activism.

For this article, we carried out a systematic process of compiling interviews -both in written press and audiovisual media- of the CEO of the company Mercado Libre Marcos Galperin. And we carried out a systematic survey of his public interventions from 2015 to 2021 in his social networks (as well as in the company's official account), particularly in the social network Twitter. This arduous survey allowed us, in a way, paraphrasing the anthropologist James Scott (2000), to enter the "official mind" of the company, to understand the dense techno-entrepreneurial philosophy that Mercado Libre produces and reproduces in Latin America. We also analyzed material from the company's website, as well as advertising and programs aimed at "producing entrepreneurs". In addition, we conducted interviews with leaders of the Transistemas collective and examined their digital

publications on various social networks, including their website. To complete our record, we included multiple journalistic sources, as well as a documentary review of relevant legislation.

Technoprogressive neoliberalism, individuals, and meritocracy

In 2019, Mercado Libre inaugurates a new section in the online buying and selling platform called “Moda sin Género” (Fashion without Gender). Aimed, the advertising will say, to “respond to those consumers who do not identify with the traditional binary division between female and male genders when choosing clothing”. The advertising begins with a first scene where a man and a woman exchange clothes, explicitly breaking with the binary imperatives of fashion. It is a very colorful advertisement with loud music in which we see gay men and women and lesbians and LGTBQ+ people appear.

Along the same lines, but radicalizing the recognition of diversities, in 2021 Mercado Libre launches a new campaign to reinforce the platform’s brand in general, with the title “Nuevos Besos Icónicos” (New Iconic Kisses). A truly audacious campaign (compared to “Moda sin Género”) in which various subjects appear kissing each other on the mouth in scenes that are precisely iconic of contemporary Western culture. In the first scene, constructed with a sense of historical period, which we could intuit is set in the interwar period of the forties, a man runs to the side of the train to say goodbye to a soldier, also male; when they meet, they give each other a passionate kiss.

The following scene is a wedding of an aristocratic couple, a cis male (looking like a dressed prince) and a trans person³ (characterized as the typical “bride in white”), who kiss on a balcony of a palace in front of the public’s eyes. The sequence continues with the scene of two women kissing in the rain. Another image recalls an iconic Hollywood scene, when Adrian climbs into the ring and kisses the champion Rocky Balboa. As a contrast, in the Mercado Libre advertisement, there are two men who kissed in the ring, disrupting the whole sense of the construction of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995), to which the figure of Rocky clearly contributes.

³ The term transgender refers to people who have a gender identity or expression that differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. In this case, it is a person with a male biological sex with a female gender identity.

In another scene, there are kisses of older men with non-hegemonic bodies: a rare *raris* in all Latin American advertising. The advertising continues with this aesthetic logic in other kisses and ends with a scene -paradigmatic- of the fall of the Berlin Wall in which a young man kisses passionately with a policeman of the German Democratic Republic. The final phrase is “to prejudice, a little kiss”. It is a campaign that is remarkably successful in the reading of an historical climate⁴ and this closing scene can be interpreted as the most finished metaphor of the political project built by the technology companies: a triumphant capitalism, in *eternum*, and a certain notion of freedom and autonomy of the subjects that challenge this established order. However, these ideas of freedom and autonomy, as we will analyze, find clear limits to the point of caricaturing these very notions.

According to these observations, we can expand on some questions: what is new about this business agenda today? What meanings and values are installed in terms of exclusion and inclusion? Are they disruptive proposals in the current context? What role and political functionality does technological discourse have concerning the recognition of diversities? What imaginaries of the future does this agenda construct? Is it possible to trace attempts to generate a resignification of the technological agenda in an alternative key? Nancy Fraser (2019) will speak of progressive neoliberalism to account for the construction of a neoliberal project with a new symbolic patina that allows it to expand the margins of acceptance to revitalize its hegemonic pretensions.

A highlight for this project is the paradigm of meritocracy and entrepreneurship. The notion of progressive neoliberalism sheds light on the alliance between the liberal currents of the new social movements (feminism, environmentalism, sexual diversity, among others) and the hegemonic sectors of contemporary capitalism: the financial economy and the business model of platform economies. At the core of this political, economic, and cultural project is the image of a hyper-individualized individual, illusorily free from social conditioning and whose meanings and practices are associated with the

⁴ This process is framed in a fertile context of public installation of a feminist agenda in Argentina and the world. Some of the agendas of the contemporary feminist movement are linked to slogans “against male violence, highlighting different forms of expression of violence, inequalities, abortion, etc.”. Some authors risk stating that we are currently facing a fourth wave of the feminist movement (Natalucci and Rey, 2018).

ideology of entrepreneurship. Donna Haraway (2004) argues that we live in a “sea of powerful narratives” where the promise of techno-science rises as part of the story of humanity’s salvation, building one of the most powerful fetishisms of the 21st century: technology. From the fundamental contributions of both authors, we propose the notion of *technoprogessive neoliberalism*.

In different but complementary terms, François Dubet (2011) argues that there are two major conceptions of social justice: on the one hand, the idea of equality of positions, and on the other, equality of opportunities. The latter, predominant in the narrative of contemporary capitalism, is based on the meritocratic principle. In this sense, it does not postulate the need to reduce inequalities between individuals; on the contrary, inequalities are fair in relation to merit.

In this sense, fueled by the claims of feminism and its criticism of the patriarchal, oppressive, and hierarchical State, environmentalism, and movements for sexual freedom, technoprogessive neoliberalism places as a value the autonomy of the individual and personal freedoms, producing an increase in the personified singularity of individuals: being an authentic individual is the new demand of neoliberalism in the current stage. Individual absorption of inequality and precariousness processes.

In this schema, entrepreneurial skills, and merit structure the desired model of social justice. The plurality of identities and claims culminate in producing an instrumentalized autonomy that turns against the subject. The flip side of this instrumentalization is the growing punitivism towards the subject who not only is not enterprising, but whose passive attitude -or active in organizational terms- undermines the justice of equal opportunities. Technoprogessive neoliberalism shows two sides of the same coin: on the one hand, a sweetened discourse of entrepreneurship and meritocracy, and on the other, a generalized war against the subject who is unloyal. The figure of the entrepreneurial subject takes to paroxysm the absolute responsabilization of the subject for his own fate.

Based on Butler (2017), we can argue that uncertainty -unequally distributed in society in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, etc.- undermines the material economic and

political conditions necessary for an autonomous organization of life. The entrepreneurial subject challenged by technoprogressive neoliberalism appeals to the construction of autonomy as a capacity to manage life based on scarce resources rather than to the emancipation and liberation of the subject, much less to collective organization. On the contrary, it binds the subject to a mere exercise of constant self-empowerment in entrepreneurial terms; it is a hyper-individualized subject, molded as a subject of performance (Byung-Chul, 2012).

Mercado Libre, in tune with technology-intensive companies in general, produces and reproduces an imaginary of the future in which technological innovation plays a central role, elaborating speeches, management policies, symbolic manifestations, public interventions of its CEO Marcos Galperin, etc., which delineate a complex discourse clearly illustrative of this new discursive line of this business fraction of global capitalism.

Empowering diverse creativity

For Mercado Libre, the democratization of opportunities is one of its leitmotifs as a business corporation. So much so that Mercado Libre has headed, for the last three years, the ranking prepared by Great Place to Work⁵ of the best companies to work for women in Argentina. This was expressed by Marcos Galperin through social media Twitter in May 2021 (Figure 1):

⁵ Great Place to Work is a foundation that also presents itself as a global firm that helps organizations achieve better business results by focusing on the work experience of all employees. For some years it has been analyzing and certifying workplaces based on the experiences of workers. Specifically, it is a foundation whose board of directors is made up of people from the business world (Great Place to Work Argentina, 2021).



Figure 1. Capture of the post made by Marcos Galperin (2021) quoting Mercado Libre’s tweet “We are proud to have been chosen as one of the best places to work for women in Argentina. Thanks to @GPTW_Argentina for this recognition and to all the people who are part of our team, who are the ones who make it possible. #PrideMELI” and adding “Congratulations to @MercadoLibre, one of the best places to work for women in #Argentina. We remain committed to building the most diverse and inclusive teams in #AmericaLatina.”

Great Place to Work measures the percentage of women in the total number of employees and women in management positions. Through their studies, it reports that in 2021 Mercado Libre has 33% of women in the total workforce and 28% of women in management positions (Mercado Libre Profile in Great Place to Work, 2021). These specific numbers, together with some interviews that highlight “eloquent phrases” about what it is like to work for women in Mercado Libre, make the company -according to the foundation- one of the best places to work. Some phrases that can be extracted from the study corresponding to Mercado Libre are the following:

It gives the same opportunity to work to both men and women in different topics, for example, I lead a Mercado Envíos process where the team has men and women who can

give their points of view and be treated equally (Results of the Great Place to Work Ranking, Mercado Libre Profile in Great Place to Work, 2021).

As can be appreciated in the extracted sentence, equal opportunities between genders are one of the issues of corporate concern for the company: “to be treated equally”. The Great Place to Work publication is accompanied by various photos illustrating the women’s stories and their work experiences. We think it is relevant to show the following photo as an example for analysis (Figure 2):



Figure 2. Image of Mercado Libre employees. Taken from the Mercado Libre Profile in Great Place to Work. May 2021. (<https://www.greatplacetowork.com.ar/perfiles-empresa/perfil-mercado-libre>)

If we examine the photo as an iconographic expression, this publication, which is not at all casual, illustrates some features that we believe are important to point out: as can be seen, there are four employees of Mercado Libre in the merchandise warehouse area.⁶ Three of them are women and one man. The three women are in an attitude, which we can describe as daring, with a lot of confidence and conviction. All four employees are wearing their masks because of the care required in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and are

⁶ Mercado Libre Warehousing Center, at the Central Market of Buenos Aires.

wearing Mercado Libre work clothes. We can ask ourselves, what is Mercado Libre trying to communicate in this picture? What imaginary of the future is it building? We can say that the empowerment of women is clearly shown as a substantive element of the entrepreneurial narrative.

In the same line, Mercado Libre launched in 2021 the “Conectadas” program. This is a free online digital skills training course to develop technological projects of “high social impact” for women between 14 and 18 years old (Conectadas, 2021). The proposal consists of ten meetings and aims to reduce the gender gap in the knowledge industry. Women residents of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru can register. As the campaign slogan says: “You will learn to train your digital thinking, analyze data, create your impact project, build your marketing and communication strategy. Each week you will develop technical and social impact skills that will allow you to be a leader” (Diario Digital *Ámbito.com*, April 22, 2021).

The objective of the program is to produce women leaders in the “digital ecosystem” at a global level. Technology is the possibility for the realization of women leaders. The video (Mercado Libre, 2021) advertising the “Conectadas” program is more than eloquent. It begins with a woman’s voiceover explaining that “our whole life moves with technology: we work, we educate ourselves, we connect”. While the voice-over says this, images of women appear simultaneously, where diversity and uniqueness are expressed in each of their faces and gestures, as we saw in the photo in the warehouse.

Next scene, the voice changes tone, evidently another woman speaks with an accent from the northern part of South America and says: “But did you know that there are only a few of us women who participate in the creation process? Here is when the screen splits into several little squares showing women from all over Latin America. Immediately another female voiceover, in Portuguese, says: “Only 6% of the applications were created by women”. Then a voice-over in Spanish returns stating that: “And only 3% of people who study information of technology identify with the female gender. Women are in the place of users, consumers, and spectators. We must take advantage of all their potential. We

want to have more female creators involved so that the solutions the world needs are better and faster” (Mercado Libre, 2021).

In advertising it is possible to observe the configuration of an entrepreneurial narrative, or more precisely techno-entrepreneurial. We speak of techno-entrepreneurship since technology -as we have been affirming- is the engine that would enable the empowerment of women in the discovery of “fast and better solutions for the world”. The appeal of this narrative is to transform the submissive position of women, who are usually linked to technology from a subordinate position, whether as users, consumers, or spectators, and to move towards an entrepreneurial attitude that makes creation and innovation possible.

It is a discourse that links optimistic, positive, hopeful, simple, and understandable ideas for the program’s target audience. Here lies one of the fundamental keys to the legitimacy and consensus of this discourse: who would be against transforming the subordinate position of women in relation to access to technology? Who would be against equal opportunities in this area? Who would be against technology? If the gender gap is reduced, enabling opportunities for women, would everything then depend on the entrepreneurial attitude? These are questions that enjoy good legitimacy today and that culminate in placing the figure of the entrepreneur and personal merits at the center of the scene.

According to this narrative, the potential of the entrepreneurial attitude finds in the technological revolution an inexhaustible source of power (Sadin, 2018; 2020). This discourse constructs a positive and renewing vision, which blurs social conditioning and dumps all responsibility on the individual. Moreover, the appeal to entrepreneurship has a global vocation by definition and is naturally situated in transcultural and global environments. As Butler Castellanos (2020) states, “it requires multiple skills that entrepreneurs accumulate through various combined pathways” (p. 37). The profile of the entrepreneur promotes trajectories immersed in the technological paradigm.

This optimism of the techno-entrepreneurial paradigm is enshrined, according to François Dubet (2011), in a social justice scheme of equal opportunities. A social dynamic

where subjects gain access to the “best places” based on the idea of “making oneself”. A society based on equal opportunities places individuals in continuous competitions since what it mobilizes is the work and talents of everyone in a society. The flip side of merits and opportunities for which each subject mobilizes resources to achieve them is, following Dubet, a society organized by a status previously secured based on a prior position: for example, rights. For the technoprogressive neoliberal project, rights break the free play of merits and opportunities.

The context of greater inequality and precariousness in the world of work turns out to be one of the main supports for the idea of opportunities and merit as the driving force of social dynamics. As Dubet states, for those who do not have a stable position in terms of job certainty -there are fewer and fewer of them- the justice of equal opportunities turns out to be the only alternative.

Finally, the figure of the entrepreneurial subject takes to paroxysm of absolute responsibilities according to the subject for their own fate. This notion of autonomy does not empower, but rather produces the opposite: it subjects. The growing processes of uncertainty linked to the increase of inequality in Latin America undermines the living conditions of important sectors of workers necessary for an autonomous organization of life. In this sense, the freedom or autonomy offered by technoprogressive neoliberalism appeals to the construction of autonomy as a capacity to manage life based on scarce resources rather than the emancipation and liberation of the subject. On the contrary, it subjects the subject to a mere exercise of permanent self-demand in corporate terms (Palermo, Radatich, Reygadas, 2020). The autonomy and emancipatory aspirations of the subjects are limited, restricted, and caricatured to the management of skills in a context of brutal helplessness.

Transistemas activism

Transistemas is an organization of political activism, inserted in the framework of the organization La C mpora,⁷ along with the Federation of Social Economy Workers. Their goal is the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people in labor fields related to technologies. Its main initiatives are to carry out free training in the intensive use of digital technologies, but also, based on their strong presence in networks and territorial links, it provides advice and training in diversity and gender to institutions and companies. They complement this work with support in relation to job searches in general, for example, among the various activities they carry out courses in digital literacy, programming, Speak up, CV preparation, portfolio creation in WordPress and LinkedIn profile, mock interviews, and a radio project. Some of these activities are articulated with government agencies or even private sector companies.

From its name Transistemas is consolidated as an organization of and for trans people, and throughout its websites, social networks, statements, and dialogues are circumscribed within the LGBTIQ+ community. Specifically, the trans category is used as an umbrella that contains, and is overflowing with, multiple identities that continue to subvert those dominant and common conceptions of gender stabilized in the male/female key. In response to this binary and hierarchical structure, which has the employable cis-heterosexual white male at the top, activism and literature rooted in feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements emerge.

The exclusion of transvestites and transgender people from formal labor and productive spaces, the consequent economic and social security difficulties they face, are a pressing problem beyond the colorful campaigns of technology companies. According to a report carried out in 2014 by ATTTA (Asociaci n de Travestis, Transexuales y Transg neros de Argentina) and Fundaci n Hu sped only 18% of the transvestite and trans population has access to formal employment (Fundaci n Hu sped, 2014). Even though five

⁷ La C mpora es una agrupaci n pol tica de la Argentina, formalmente fundada en 2006. De marcada orientaci n kirchnerista, la agrupaci n apoy  desde sus inicios las gestiones de gobierno de N stor Kirchner y Cristina Fern ndez de Kirchner. Actualmente, en la gesti n de Alberto Fern ndez es uno de los grupos pol ticos de mayor incidencia dentro del espacio de gobierno.

provinces in Argentina⁸ approved the Transvestite-Trans Labor Quota Law in 2020,⁹ none of them implemented it properly.

In this pressing context, Transistemas was formed, and on January 21, 2020, they launched the first free computer training course for transvestites, trans and non-binary people (Figure 3). This first experience had twenty-four students, trans men, and trans women, most of whom work in precarious jobs or, failing that, in sex work. Since then, they have continued to carry out trainings and various activities to support the LGBTIQ+ community, until September 2021, when they were legally constituted as a Civil Association.



Figure 3. Introductory talk in the first Transistemas course held in a local of La C mpora. Taken from "Hackear el (cis)tema" of El Grito del Sur, January 24, 2021. (<https://elgritodelsur.com.ar/2020/01/transistemas-curso.html>)

⁸ These are the provinces of Chubut, Chaco, R o Negro, Santa Fe, and the Province of Buenos Aires.

⁹ In July 2021, the Argentine government made official this Thursday the enactment of Law 27,636 on Employment Promotion for Transvestites, Transsexuals and Transgender Persons, through the publication in the Official Gazette of Decree 721/2020. The law contemplates, among other demands, that the three branches of the national government, public ministries, decentralized or autarchic agencies, non-state public entities and state-owned companies and corporations must employ at least 1% of their total staff with people from this group.

We are interested in highlighting their political activism leads them to link with political organizations in other provinces: for example, “Mujeres en Tecnología de Córdoba” or other organizations linked to trans activism in Santa Cruz, Tucumán, and Salta.

Transistemas from its very beginnings achieved great attention from the technology sector and within the LGBTIQ+ community. The consolidation of its institutional identity was achieved from a work of political articulation with associations such as the popular high school Mocha Celis, the Association of Abogadas Feministas and Chicas en Tecnología and representatives of different sectors of the feminist movement, at first sight quite different¹⁰ but that found a common point in Transistemas.

The organization, in turn, has been working on a set of strategies to link up with key actors outside the community. These can be classified into three main groups: social organizations (cooperatives and feminist organizations), state entities, facilitators of institutional recognition and providers of public financing frameworks, and finally, the private sector - companies - as a target space for the community and the productive sectors.

The main goal of the organization is the labor insertion of transvestites, trans and non-binary people in formal jobs, an alternative made impossible by the sum of situations of exclusion and violence they suffer. Since childhood, the experience of transvestites, as Josefina Fernandez (2004) explains, is involved in various situations of violence. Most of the time it comes from the family or school reaction, which, being institutions structured by binary classificatory principles on sexuality and gender, trigger disciplinary mechanisms in the face of the different identity performance of a transgender child. This situation continues in adult life, to which is added the exclusion in organizational and institutional spaces, structured in the same way, that end up demolishing the possibility of labor

¹⁰ The above-mentioned organizations with a feminist perspective diverge in terms of their fields of action - education, law and technology-, origins and disparate structures. While the “Mocha Celis” is a free high school resulting from transvestite/trans activism and popular education, the Asociación de Abogadas Feministas Argentina emerges as a local chapter of a professional organization in Chile. For its part, Chicas en Tecnología is positioned as a civil society organization that mobilizes initiatives aimed at teenagers so that they can enter the technological entrepreneurial field.

formality. In this process, they approach sex work¹¹ where they find not only one of the few means available to earn money and a place to connect with others, but also a public space of power and self-esteem, where they can express their identity.

To problematize the horizon of possibilities for people in the community, a leader of the organization explains her point of view on the need to incorporate training in technology:

I am not against a colleague wanting to start a hairdressing salon or cook, but it is necessary to move towards other opportunities. With how expelled we are from the system and from education, we don't want to continue to stay away from technology. At a time when most jobs depend on using a computer, not providing digital tools to our female colleagues is totally unfair (interview by Lorena Sánchez for El Grito del Sur, January 24, 2021).

The selected fragment gives us several clues to understand some of the main ideas of the political action of this organization and the meanings that are put into play. In the first place, adverse labor conditions are expressed in their magnitude: the established labor paradigm that systemically excludes dissidence from cis heteronormativity is made explicit: an incontrovertible reality. We can also speak of the limit to access to formal jobs and education, resulting in greater precariousness and lower remuneration. It is also combined with a cultural and ideological segregation that defines which activities are allowed for each gender -sexual division of labor-, which acquires another dimension in the face of the transvestite-trans experience.

Finally, we see how the technological gap, linked to material conditions, becomes key in the face of the growing digitalization of work. However, it is also possible to glimpse the political meanings associated with trans activism that have certain points of contact with large technology companies such as Mercado Libre: we refer to the recognition of diversities and technology as a possible condition for new opportunities. What is

¹¹ According to the publication of the Public Defender's Office of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (2017) only 9% of trans women and transvestites who were surveyed were part of the formal labor market and for more than 70% sex work constituted the main source of income. In the case of trans men, the number rises to 48.5%.

interesting is that these points of contact are completely re-signified from the political praxis: first, the word “female colleague” becomes visible in every conversation.

This is not a casual word; it is a political category that alludes directly to political militancy. We could trace its antecedents in a tradition of grassroots and leftist militancy in Argentina, but reappropriated and reused by Peronist grassroots militancy. At present, the politicization of the category “female colleague” is unfailingly associated with Peronist activism. On the other hand, the phrase “I am not against a female colleague wanting to start a hairdressing salon or cook, but it is necessary to move towards other opportunities” it is also interesting. Hairdressing and cooking are feminized activities, but when we talk about technologies, the barrier of a strongly masculinized activity appears.

Technology appears as a tool for empowerment. Here we return to Donna Haraway's (2004) approaches and the narrative that places technology at the center of a development agenda for humanity. Technology, as in the Free Market discourse, is presented as the fundamental element for the empowerment of trans people. Access to technologies, in the case of Transistemas activism, produces tools with the potential to generate greater freedom and autonomy. But we speak of a politicized autonomy and freedom in the opposite sense of a technoprogressive neoliberal paradigm.

Rather than generating tools of subjection by caricaturing the notions of freedom and autonomy, the activism of Transistemas starts from the recognition of the precariousness of labor and the disarticulation of the supports that provide security and job certainty of neoliberal projects. And it is from this recognition that technology is constituted as a tool for social justice. Activisms such as Transistemas and other organizations with similar objectives are the driving force behind achievements such as the Trans Labor Quota Law. At this matter, freedom and autonomy are strongly linked to the conquest of rights and various forms of intervention of state policies, rather than an individualizing project and entrepreneurial performance. Rights as conquests are the supports that provide security and certainty to the LGBTIQ+ collective. It is the alternative to neoliberal projects and the hyper-individualization of the subject, in which

unemployment, difficulty in employability or labor uncertainty, corresponds to the lack of will of the subjects or rather the lack of an entrepreneurial attitude.

Regarding the choice of the software industry to focus their labor insertion, the coordinator told us the following:

And another thing about systems is that you don't need a degree. If you have a degree in systems, you will get paid that much. No. You didn't study anything, and you know how to program? You can negotiate with your bosses and tell them "Hey, I want to get paid 200,000 pesos or else I'll go to another company". And they give it to you, or you go to another company that will give you that money, as I had seen it happen, people do it and that's it. Because it depends on the branch in which you specify yourself (general coordinator of Transistemas, February 2021).

The knowledge linked to technology appears as a tool for empowerment in the face of the arrogance of technology companies. The management of technology is not to generate "leading people" but to generate better conditions for negotiating with companies. Whether for the formal or informal market, having a higher level of education has a great impact on the employability and possibilities of transvestites and transgender people. Although since 2012, with the enactment of the Gender Identity Law,¹² the level of education attained by people who assume themselves to be trans before the age of 13 has progressively improved, it is still far from the national average.¹³ Therefore, the premise "you don't need a degree" becomes one of the most decisive reasons for the choice of the systems sector.¹⁴

¹² This is Law 26.743, enacted on May 9, 2012, which establishes that "every person has the right: a) To the recognition of their gender identity; b) To the free development of their person in accordance with their gender identity; c) To be treated in accordance with their gender identity and, in particular, to be identified as such in the instruments that accredit their identity with respect to the first name(s), image and sex with which they are registered therein". This regulatory framework together with the activism of the collective enabled educational institutional spaces at different levels of schooling that receive trans population (Fundación Huésped, 2014).

¹³ In 2005, the percentage of transvestites and trans women with completed high school in the City of Buenos Aires was 20.8% and rose to 24.3% in 2016. However, this number turns out to be much lower if we compare it with the schooled percentage of the population over 25 years old in this same city, which results close to 70% for that same year. (Ministerio Público de la Defensa de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, 2017).

¹⁴ It has been statistically proven that the lack of a university or college degree is not an impediment to acquiring a job. A recent survey conducted in the sector indicated that at least 2.8% of a sample of more than 5,800 technology workers had only a high school degree as educational certification (Casas *et al.*, 2021).

Concluding remarks

We can say that the techno-inclusive agenda proposed by *technoprogressive neoliberalism* produces a revitalization of the idea of the subject based on the figure of the entrepreneur. The amalgamation of these notions configures a particular idea of the individual around entrepreneurship. Nancy Fraser (2019) will say that at the center of the debate on the construction of democracy rises an ethos in which ideals of diversity, multiculturalism and environmentalism coexist combined with the notion of meritocracy. This inclusive agenda raised by technology companies is a veiled criticism of an organized society, taking up Dubet's concepts, in relation to the "equality of positions", that is, the criticism is given to a model of society in which an intervening State acts (in social terms), where they are recognized as possessors of the means of production and sellers of their labor force, and in this sense the rights regulate the inequalities produced.

This model of social organization leaves clear that produces innumerable injustices in those social groups that Dubet calls outsiders. In this sense, for Dubet "the struggle for social justice slips from the struggle for equality of places to the struggle for equal access to all places" (2011, p. 51). What is at stake in this dispute are measures to activate so-called "positive discrimination" policies that grant equal opportunities to those who, despite their merits, do not have access to the best places. Likewise, an idea of the past is built against a techno-inclusive idea of the future. This neoliberal technoprogressive rationality is nourished by some feminist demands, redefining them in terms of domination. In addition, the notion of equality of opportunity, energized by entrepreneurial faculties and personal merit, enjoys a growing consensus.

The entrepreneurial subject challenged by *technoprogressive neoliberalism* binds the subject to a mere exercise of good choices in the face of contexts of growing uncertainty. This situation is even more radicalized and complex for LGBTIQ+ people. In the peripheral capitalism of Latin America, with staggering levels of inequality and increasing concentration of wealth, the operation of *progressive neoliberalism* is even more exposed: to produce a fetishized exaltation of entrepreneurship as the official ideology of the times, which illusorily ignores the multiple social conditions in the material life of the subjects.

Obviously, this biased conception of diversity put into practice only fulfills a “marketing” function, since, as we can see in the Transistemas experience, it could never generate a profound transformation without considering the real conditions of existence of those excluded by the system. We could even say that this fetish “inclusion”, detached from its real purpose, is reduced to an employee recruitment policy.

Transistemas, as a political activist organization, takes the agenda of diversity and inclusion, but produces a twist in its practice and discourse that collides with the neoliberal technoprogressive agenda. First, it makes explicit a pressing situation of the LGBTQ+ community. At the same time, from the political practice, it appeals to technology as a tool to build correlations of force against technology companies. Finally, it appeals to the realization of conquests and rights as State policies rather than to an individualizing practice or entrepreneurial performance.

This operation of redefining the technophilic and entrepreneurial discourse acquires a remarkable political value in the context of the overwhelming advance of these ideas in the common sense of our societies. It is precisely the advances in the political imagination from the subaltern sectors that could allow us to recreate the dominant meanings of the time without denying its fundamental coordinates, such as the technological revolution and digital transformation of our lives.

Bibliographic references

- Bueno, C. (Coord.) (2020). *Ser emprendedor en el México del siglo XXI*. Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México.
- Butler, J. (2017). *Cuerpos aliados y lucha política. Hacia una teoría performativa de la asamblea*, Paidós.
- Byung-Chul, H. (2012). *La sociedad del cansancio*, Herder.
- Conectadas (2021). Un programa de Mercado Libre. <https://conectadaslatam.la/es/home>
- Connell, R. (1995). *Masculinities*, University of California Press.

- Diario Digital Ámbito.com (2021). Curso gratis de Mercado Libre: ¿cómo anotarse? <https://www.ambito.com/informacion-general/mercado-libre/curso-gratis-como-anotarse-n5186597>
- Decreto 721/2020 (3 de septiembre de 2020). Cupo laboral para personas travestis, transexuales y transgénero en el Sector Público Nacional, *Boletín Oficial*. 4 de septiembre de 2020. <https://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/detalleAviso/primera/234520/20200904>
- Dubet, F. (2011). *Repensar la justicia social. Contra el mito de la igualdad de oportunidades*. Siglo XXI Editores.
- El Grito del Sur (2021). "Hackear el (cis)tema". <https://www.elgritodelsur.com.ar/2020/01/transistemas-curso.html>
- Fernández, J. (2004). *Cuerpos desobedientes. Travestismo e identidad de género*. Edhasa.
- Fraser, N. (2019). *¡Contrahegemonía ya! Por un populismo progresista que enfrente al neoliberalismo*. Siglo XXI Editores.
- Fundación Huésped (2014). *Ley de identidad de género y acceso al cuidado de la salud de las personas trans en Argentina*. Fundación Huésped. <https://www.huesped.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/OSI-informe-FINAL.pdf>
- Galperin, M. (12 de mayo de 2021). Felicitaciones @MercadoLibre uno de los mejores lugares para trabajar [Tweet]. https://twitter.com/marcos_galperin/status/1392654756796043271
- Great Place to Work Argentina. (2021). *Cultura organizacional*. Consultoría. <https://www.greatplacetowork.com.ar/>
- Haraway, D. (2004) [1997]. *Testigo_Modesto@ Segundo_Milenio. HombreHembra@_ Conoce_Oncorrotón®: Feminismo y tecnociencia*. UOC. Colección Nuevas Tecnologías y Sociedad.
- Ley 26.743 (9 de mayo de 2012). Establécese el derecho a la identidad de género de las personas. *Boletín Oficial*. 23 de mayo de 2012. <https://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/detalleAviso/primera/70106/20120524>
- Mercado Libre (2021). *Conectadas* [Video]. <https://conectadaslatam.la/es/home>

Palermo, H.; Radetich, N. y Reygadas, L. (2020). "Trabajo mediado por tecnologías digitales: sentidos del trabajo, nuevas formas de control y trabajadores ciborg". *Revista LAT*, Núm. 7, enero/junio 2020.

Perfil Mercado Libre en Great Place to Work (2021). Descripción general de Mercado Libre. <https://www.greatplacetowork.com.ar/perfiles-empresa/perfil-mercado-libre>

Sadin, E. (2018). *La silicolonización del mundo. La irresistible expansión del liberalismo digital*. Caja Negra.

Sadin, E. (2020). *La inteligencia artificial o el desafío del siglo. Anatomía de un antihumanismo radical*. Caja Negra.

Scott, J. (2000). *Los dominados y el arte de la resistencia*. Discursos ocultos. Era.

Srnicek, N. (2018). *Capitalismo de plataformas*. Caja Negra.

HERNÁN M. PALERMO

Argentinian. Doctor in Anthropological Sciences. Director of *Revista Latinoamericana de Antropología del Trabajo*. Researcher at the Center for Labor Studies and Research. Director of the Master's Program in Latin American Labor Studies, Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Universidad de Buenos Aires. Lines of research: Latin American anthropologies of work; gender and work; the construction of masculinities at work; relationship between new technologies and work. Latest publications: *Tratado Latinoamericano de Antropología del Trabajo y La producción de la masculinidad en el trabajo petrolero*.

PATRICIA VENTRICI

Argentinian. PhD in Social Sciences. Researcher at the Center for Labor Studies and Research. Professor at Universidad de Buenos Aires. Lines of research: trade unionism in recent Argentina; labor and platform economy. Latest publications: "La siliconización del trabajo. Una experiencia argentina" y "Estrategias de erosión del poder sindical en Argentina. Un análisis del periodo 2015-2018".

ROCÍO SANTARCIERI

Argentinian. Student of the career of Anthropological Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Universidad de Buenos Aires. Line of research: work in technology.