Authoritarian Neoliberalism from Below
Subjectivity and Platform Capitalism in Argentina and Brazil

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In recent years, after the decline of the so-called Latin American 'pink tide', it became commonplace to speak of an authoritarian turn or the return of neoliberalism to the region. Undoubtedly, the decline of progressivism as the lingua franca of Latin American politics had given way to governments with a marked right-wing profile, explicitly anti-progressive rhetoric, and aggressive agendas of economic flexibilization (Svampa 2020). The governments of Michel Temer, after a coup d'état, and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, or Mauricio Macri in Argentina seemed to reconfigure a new political landscape in Latin America that is somehow reminiscent of the 1990s, the golden age of neoliberalism. But this narrative of the Latin American authoritarian turn rarely considers certain continuities that lie beneath the changes of administration and which are based on slower but constant processes of deployment of what we understand here as neoliberal rationality. Such deployments show the latent continuities between the old progressive years and the new conservative years, whilst letting us understand that authoritarianism is not limited to the lack of the rule of law, nor to the ideological profile of the president in office, nor even to the configuration of the state-form. This is because understanding authoritarianism means also being able to conceptualize manners of production and management of life, manners that involve ideologies and representations of the social world, but also bodily experiences and subjective affections and emotions that are often not directly articulated through public discourses or political actions.

In this chapter, we will explore the subjective dimensions of neoliberal biopolitics (those "manners of production and management of life") by analysing the working conditions in the platform economies in Argentina and Brazil. In our opinion, this approach may shed light on aspects of that authoritarianism spread over society which cannot be fully caught by the narrative of administration changes, and on forms of neoliberal authoritarianism, at a time and in a region in which neoliberalism has lost its seductive power, but not its power to make lives precarious.

As we said, we will focus here on the world of work, fundamentally on what is currently known as the platform economy or gig economies, since from there are visible certain key elements of the biopolitical dimension of authoritarianism that involves the organization of labour processes and production of subjective features. These gig economies represent, at the same time and paradoxically, one of the most recent stages of the technological management of labour and one of the deepest stages of labour precarization, which makes these platform economies a privileged place to observe the coexistence between technology and precarization inherent to the new model of neoliberal accumulation, as well as forms of authoritarianism embedded in the management of subjectivities.

In the framework of the global expansion of capital, countries with high levels of informality and precarity, such as Latin American countries, appear as especially favourable environments for the deployment and expansion of these digital economies, due both to the weakness of their legal frameworks, the difficulties for labour market insertion, and the limited infrastructure required (Hidalgo Cordero and Salazar Daza 2020). Although the platform economy is one chapter in a long history of the precarization of labour and life in the societies of the Global South, it is now updated by technologies that have succeeded in extending its control into zones that had hitherto remained at the margins of the exploitative practices of capital: peripheral territories, along with their survival strategies and sociability networks (Franco 2021). Through the promotion of values such as those of flexibility or autonomy, and due to the convenience of their hiring procedures, these companies are often the most immediate employment option among young people and immigrants—and sometimes the only one available—in contexts of recurring economic crisis and structural unemployment (Antunes 2018). Particularly in Argentina and Brazil, companies such as Rappi, PedidosYa, and Glovo started to emerge between 2016 and 2018 reshaping working conditions as well as implying transformations at the level of workers' subjectivities.

As said, this chapter aims to present an approach to the biopolitical dimension of management and control over the workforce in the platform economies to understand authoritarian continuities in societies from the Global South. Towards that end, firstly we will define neoliberalism as a form of political rationality 'from below' since this micropolitical perspective permits inquiry into the subjectivity dimensions of labour management. Secondly, we will offer some comments on the functioning of algorithmic management and, thirdly, an analysis of the impact of the on-demand platforms on workers' subjectivities based on case studies and other research in Argentina and Brazil. In the last section, we will reflect on some theoretical and political aspects of the connection between authoritarianism and neoliberalism in the field of practices and forms of subjectivization.

Neoliberalism from Above and from Below

The financial crisis of 2008 seems to have exposed the weakness of certain liberal imagery that shaped the political culture of post-war Western societies and, since the 1980s, also of Latin America: an imaginary based on the combination of an institutional rule of law, an open market economy, and liberal values of socialization (Robles 2020a). Nowadays, we witness how this liberal consensus is being challenged by a wave of far-right leaders and political movements around the world, which has led to the question of how to conceptualize the connections between neoliberalism, as the latter phase of the capitalist mode of accumulation, and the (re)emergence of authoritarian and anti-democratic political expressions. However, this discussion had already been present in the first moments of the neoliberal revolution, as shown, for example, in the debate about the "authoritarian statism" after Nicos Poulantzas (2000) towards the end of the 1970s, or about the "authoritarian populism" after Stuart Hall (2007) in the mid-1980s. Currently, and in continuity with those perspectives, the connection between authoritarianism and neoliberalism has been discussed by political theory mainly at macro-political or discursive-ideological levels: in terms, for example, of anti-democratic modifications of the state's structure and functioning (Bruff 2013), of mixtures of authoritarian values and ultraliberal dogmas (Biebricher 2000), of amorphous ideological formations caused by the hegemonic crisis of neoliberalism (Brown 2020), or of neoliberal crisis management strategies (Demirovic 2018).

These multiplicities of perspectives are partly due to the elusiveness of the very concept of neoliberalism, which has become widespread in social sciences to define a new historical period from the 1970s onwards. Despite its condition as a 'newcomer' in social and political thought, multiple approaches and disputes are going around about what neoliberalism means, making it impossible to reach an agreement on its meaning. To give some examples of this situation, in the last decade neoliberalism was defined as a set of ideas on the economy and society (Slobodian 2017), as ways of regimenting the Global South after its decolonization (Borón et al. 1999), as a set of institutional policies carried out by supranational institutions (Harvey 2007), as a de-democratization process (Brown 2015), and as the concrete hegemony of financialization and austerity (Streeck 2013), among others. However, there is a certain line of inquiry that we want to follow up in this chapter that defines neoliberalism as a particular kind of political and practical rationality, since it will allow us, on the one hand, to connect neoliberalism with the ideological production of subjectivities and, on the other hand, to understand its pragmatic functioning beyond the institutional level.

The mentioned perspectives arise from Michel Foucault's 1979 lectures, titled *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2004). There, Foucault defines neoliberalism as a new "art of governmentality" that rules the relation between state, market, and subjects by ex-

panding the market rationality to the entire social field through the generalization of the enterprise model. In this way, neoliberalism is understood as a device that produces practical rationalities, based no longer on exchange but on competition, and modes of subjectivization oriented toward the promotion of human capital. The central point is that this neoliberal understanding of the corporate form as an atom of society has the ideological effect of obscuring the contradiction between capital and labour by transforming the workers into their capitalists. Those ideas have given rise to a research field called 'governmentality studies', which has focused on the techniques, institutions, and reflections on techniques that allow the exercise of specific forms of power over populations (Barry et al. 1996).

Although this research field has produced contributions to inquiry into authoritarian governmentality methods, these contributions have been mostly limited to the analysis of ideas, schools, and theories on authoritarian and racist control over populations (Haidar 2019). On the contrary, our perspective will attempt to directly address the psychosomatic dimensions of biopolitical management in the workplace as, from the neoliberal view, it is up to the individuals to ensure the prosperity of themselves as enterprises: the individuals on their own must invest and manage their capital, improve their skills and competencies, and obtain the income corresponding to their performances. In short, neoliberalism consists of ways of governing through the constant creation and management of freedoms: unlike sovereign regimes, that had tried to constrain the behaviours of subjects, neoliberal governmentality works by setting up a series of technologies, practices, and ideologies that promote free initiative, self-responsibility, and individual self-management. Neoliberalism contains the paradox that its authoritarian premises are included in its definition of freedom (Robles 2020b).

Then, understanding neoliberalism as political rationality allows for light to be shed on the mechanisms of exploitation through a set of everyday tactics of (self-)control and (self-)surveillance, ways of behaving, feeling, and thinking that shape the social world 'from below'. Following this line of thought, Verónica Gago (2014/2017) in her book *La razón neoliberal (Neoliberalism from Below)* coined the concept of "neoliberalism from below" to complement the Foucauldian understanding by bringing up the neoliberal specificities of contemporary Latin American societies. In a simplified topology, neoliberalism "from above" would mean a global accumulation regime associated with transformations at the nation-state level, while "from below" refers to "forms of life that reorganize notions of freedom, calculation, and obedience, projecting a new collective affectivity and rationality" (Gago 2014, 6). This approach is particularly valuable as it tries to explain why neoliberalism is still alive and effective after its crisis of political legitimacy, as she shows through an analysis of the popular and informal economic sectors in Buenos Aires. In Gago's perspective, neoliberalism is always involved in ways of appropriation, alteration, and relaunching from the grassroots, combined and contaminated by

local and traditional know-how, communal strategies, local representations, previous experiences, and cultural values.

Unlike Gago, in this text, we will not focus on the pragmatics and agency strategies of the actors, but on the subjective consequences of the algorithmic organization of work. However, this does not prevent us from speaking of neoliberalism analysed "from below" since we are looking for those authoritarian dimensions of neoliberal systems of management. Thus, this understanding of neoliberalism, a type of political rationality that works from below, leads to a central question of our research: the question of subjectivities. Neoliberalism is basically a way of producing subjectivities through permanently demanding competition, engagement, performance, and self-capitalization. In the last few years, many authors have been creating concepts to refer to this connection between the mechanisms of subjectivization and neoliberal transformations, such as the "entrepreneurial self" (Bröckling 2007), the "achievement-subject" (Han 2014), or the "neoliberal subject" (Dardot and Laval 2009). Although most of these reflections were formulated from experiences from industrialized countries and based on consultants, entrepreneurs, and managers as models of "neoliberal subjectivities", they permit us to reflect on the impact of neoliberal transformations on the subjectivities related to precarious working conditions in the Global South.

In this regard, what we want to analyse in the following sections is a phenomenon that has received scant attention: the subjective effects of the working conditions in platform economies. The theoretical and political meaning of this subject lies in the fact that it will allow us to observe the authoritarian deployment of neoliberal governance at the subjective level, that is, techno-political modes of acting on bodies and psyche that are a necessary condition for the functioning of neoliberal governmentality. Furthermore, we will argue that these techno-political mechanisms of management of subjectivities must be characterized as authoritarian insofar as they systematically produce dispossession of subjective autonomy, psychophysical pathologies, and modes of desymbolization through biopolitical mechanisms of the immunization of labour relations.

Algorithmic Governmentality

The location-based platform companies have been growing in Brazil and Argentina since 2015 by feeding on the massive unemployment resulting from periodic capitalist crises and the failure of the developmental model's promises of absorption of workers into the formal labour market. The platform economies can be described, in general terms, as companies based on digital infrastructures (platforms) that operate by connecting, through algorithmic technologies, the demand for service with its supply, and which must be understood as part of an extensive course of

capitalist readaptation after the crisis of the industrial mode of production in the 1970s (Srnicek 2016). Then, there is a direct relationship between the crisis of overaccumulation and the falling rate of profit that opened up in the 1970s, and the implementation of the algorithmic management of labour. That crisis led to capital going on the offensive against work for the reduction of labour costs and the participation of workers in the distribution of profits, at the same time commencing a process of financialization and increased investment in intangible capital over physical capital, for example machines and installations (Beniger 1989).

However, the emergence of algorithmics must be understood as a continuity but also as a rupture with previous modes of automation, since algorithmics allows the organization of work without investment in physical capital or the development of complex technologies. Algorithms are basically a cheaper and relatively simple technology of work management that can be defined as computational metrics by which decisions are made automatically according to a given structure. After the 2008 financial crisis and the recent crisis of the pandemic, the implementation of algorithmic management (over the more expensive and complex machine or robotic automation) accelerated and became the model of rationalization, control, and exploitation of labour *par excellence* of post-growth capitalism (Schaupp 2021). These platform economies carry out their activities in the interstices and legal loopholes and are based on an extractivist logic of data, financial rent, and labour force to the point of exhaustion, both physical and mental.

That can be seen in the case of location-based platform companies that have spread to all the cities of the world in recent years. They are companies whose on-demand workers operate in an anonymous position of intermediary between supply and demand that gives these companies their claim to neutrality, i.e. to belong neither to the sphere of production nor to that of consumption and, crucially, to avoid being labelled as employers. By offering seductive gains at the very beginning of their operations, those companies created an army of workers that has not stopped increasing even if the tariffs are frozen and the individual earnings become too little to make ends meet. Therefore, reflecting on the labour dimension of platform economies points to the heart of this new form of capitalist value extraction, since, as Philipp Staab states, these new digital economies are based on the "alliance between the figures of rent-seeking capital and the consumer" to the detriment of the figure of the producer (Staab 2019, 277), i.e. an alliance between financial capital that seeks quick returns and consumer citizens who pursue low-cost profits at the expense of the intensification of labour exploitation.

As has been widely discussed, neoliberalism sets in motion the permanent process of fragmentation of society into a myriad of individuals identified as micro-enterprises and mobilized by the relentless pursuit of self-valorization, but with the spread of digital platforms, this process has reached new limits. Among the delivery and shipping app workers, can be identified an ongoing process of hyper-

individualization arising from the systematic adoption by app companies of "immunization strategies" (Van Doorn 2017). These strategies consist of measures and procedures of subordination, management, and exploitation of workers that on the one hand make it very difficult for the companies to be held legally accountable, and on the other hand, directly and indirectly, intensify the productivity of the deliverers. The immunization strategies are also associated with the "demutualization of risks" that reaches three main and interrelated levels: health risks, financial risks, and epistemic risks (De Stefano 2016). Following this thread, we advocate for the inclusion of subjective risks linked to dimensions of psychosomatic pathologies, as we will discuss further.

Central to these immunization strategies is the invisible nature of algorithmic power through which companies manage to maximize control and management of labour, as well as the flows between supply and demand, anonymously attributing to the indecipherable calculability of software the allocation of bonuses, oscillation in the value of payments, inconsistencies in the distribution of orders, and even arbitrariness in the definition of suspensions. Hence, as Alexandra Mateescu and Aiha Nguyen (2019, 13) explain: technology such as "algorithmic management … can serve to shift existing power dynamics and destabilize employment relationships" in terms of (1) "surveillance and control", which creates new speed and efficiency pressures on workers and removes them from the decision-making; (2) "transparency", that creates power asymmetries difficult to be challenged without knowledge of how these systems work; (3) "bias and discrimination", based on consumer-sourced rating systems that "can introduce biased and discriminatory practices towards workers" (ibid., 2) without the company being responsible for those practices; and (4) "accountability", since algorithmic management is used to "distance companies from the effects of their business decisions, obscuring specific decisions made about how a system should function" (ibid., 14).

These forms of immunization, propitiated and sustained by the mode of operation proper to algorithmic governance, directly affect individual and collective efforts to protect against risks, since they increase the sense of arbitrariness and meaninglessness in everyday work, further weakening workers' security in their ability to interpret the apps and make decisions. This is what can be called 'epistemic risk', which concerns the transformation of uncertainty, arbitrariness, and illegibility into algorithmic work-management mechanisms. Everything is happening as if algorithmic power permanently produces the shuffling of the rules of the digital game, forcing workers to frequently revise their room for manoeuvre and leeway, a situation that can be described as an incessant effort on the part of "partners" to "provisionally manage uncertainty" (Guerra 2021, 212).

This immunization of platform companies begins as early as the signing of the employment contract, where workers are usually defined as "collaborators" or "partners", an expression that seeks to dilute the contradictions between capital

and labour by reinforcing the idea of the autonomous and free individual who participates in horizontal labour relations. Companies constantly claim that they are not employers, since the image they intend to give of themselves is, as we said, that of an intermediary between the needs of someone who requires a delivery service (a consumer), with someone who offers a product (for example, a restaurant), and an entrepreneur who offers to transport it (the rider). Appealing to the ideals of individualization of work, entrepreneurship, meritocracy, individual effort, etc., these companies offer an idealized world where there are no bosses, no hierarchies, no fixed schedules, and where the possibility of obtaining a high income depends solely on individual efforts (Diana Menéndez 2019).

As a generalized modus operandi, companies are exempt from the costs and legal obligations imposed by legal labour relations as well as from the burdens of the activities, since it is the 'partners' or 'collaborators' (i.e. the workers) who assume the losses and expenses of their work (traffic accidents, diseases, and contagions during the pandemic, assaults, robberies, vehicle breakdowns, obsolescence or breakage of the smartphone, connectivity problems, etc.). The assumption of costs and burdens by the individual worker also implies, in the absence of the minimum rights and benefits assured by labour legislation, the assumption of health and financial risks. This effectiveness of the platforms in putting their workers outside of the social protection system and assimilating them into the figure of the self-employed entrepreneur is connected not only to the weakness of labour regulation in countries such as Argentina and Brazil but also to the characteristics of algorithmic management which, by depersonalizing the management and control body, fosters an impression of autonomy and flexibility that quickly becomes illusory.

Working in Platform Capitalism

As seen, platform companies manage work tasks through algorithmic immunization mechanisms that take place in day-to-day work, for instance with the immunization of communication flows between the 'partners' and the company, which reduces daily contact between the workers and the company to anonymous notifications and automatic messages. In many cases, communication with the company takes place through call centres located abroad, in countries such as Colombia or Peru, and therefore contact is made with operators who are unfamiliar with the geography and situation of where the workers carry out their tasks, and who can therefore offer few solutions to daily inconveniences. Thus, communication is experienced by the workers as a Sisyphean task, always postponed by unanswered calls, emails that are automatically replied to, or the innumerable intermediate

instances in which other precarious workers give standardized explanations to enquiries. Maurício Santos, a driver for a platform company, expresses the following:

> The relationship between the operator and the application is very difficult. You try, but the app gives you ready-made messages; you try with a phone, but it rings and no one answers and, when it answers, sometimes you know more than the person who answers; you call there to ask for guidance, the person asks you questions that make no sense to you … it's a mess, it's a big mess, and you feel disoriented, and the only solution that comes up is to learn by watching videos on YouTube. (Pessoa Masson and Santos Oliveira 2021)

Cases of temporary suspension or definitive blocking without any justification by the companies, or the so-called *suspensão branca* ('white suspension'), which occurs without the worker knowing that they are being sanctioned, are frequent in this way, in which someone can go for hours or even days without receiving a delivery request without being officially suspended. This can happen for many reasons: receiving bad evaluations, breaching a contractual clause, rejecting a high number of orders, simply because a client complains about something beyond the worker's control, or even in retaliation for having participated in protests or demonstrations against the company (Abílio 2020). Besides that, the arbitrariness of the supposed algorithmic functioning reaches other spheres of the management of platformed labour, such as, for example, the distribution of bonuses for workers who reach a certain goal set by the application. The complaints of workers, in this case, point to the abrupt interruption of delivery requests when someone was close to earning some additional bonus, a practice which causes frustration and spreads distrust of the applications.

Thus, labour tasks in location-based platforms intensify the hyper-individualization of the worker by deepening the spatial decentralization of work as a fundamental condition for full localization. In this sense, performing a just-in-time job means being permanently available to accept tasks that require travel to any place, no matter how far away it may be. This deterritorialization of just-in-time work contributes to the scarcity of opportunities for workers to meet and, therefore, to build emotional and political ties. In this way, workers are at the disposal of the companies all the time, despite only being paid for a fraction of this time: strictly the period concerning the journey from the commercial establishment to the customer's hands. It is increasingly common to find in São Paulo or Buenos Aires, for example, huge groups of delivery people sitting under marquees, grouped in squares or busy streets, concentrating on their smartphones, waiting for an order that may take hours to arrive. The presence of the digital platforms in the workers' lives extends beyond working hours, as the application remains installed on their phones and therefore continues to extract their private data and record their daily activities.

Algorithmic power seeks to individualize the organization of work, something that the workers experience as the condition of being thrown to their fate, as solely and exclusively responsible for their gains and losses, and for survival and resilience strategies. These precarious conditions are aggravated by the structural effects of neoliberalization in countries such as Argentina and Brazil, with weak mechanisms of social protection and state control over companies' compliance with the law, as well as the constant increase in unemployment. This situation of existential anguish is described by Mauricio Santos:

> What surprises me most about working with apps, unfortunately, is the feeling that you're on your own, right? You must figure everything out your way. You don't have support. You try ... you try communication, you try something, but if you don't stop to analyse everything and try to solve it yourself, you will be waiting for a miracle to happen practically, that we are alone. So, it is a feeling of loneliness at the beginning. If you don't overcome this barrier of this feeling of work, you end up with psychological damage. (Pessoa Masson and Santos Oliveira 2021)

This psychological damage is registered by health indicators in Brazil and Argentina. For example, in Brazil depression and anxiety are the second-biggest causes of work-related illnesses and the first for musculoskeletal disorders. Psychic damage is also accompanied by significant organic impacts, as the requirement to work 12 to 14 hours a day leads to bone and muscle injuries, as well as diseases associated with the circulatory system or eating disorders. In the workers' accounts, such anxiety is strongly linked to loneliness, the meeting of productivity targets being met with silence, and lack of interaction with managers or supervisors. When the orders do not arrive, the silence of the phone echoes the silence of the companies and customers; however, when the service arrives and the expected 'ding' of the application notification is heard, the anxiety is related to the impossibility of rejecting the order due to the threat of suspension, even if the distances are enormous, the area is dangerous, or there are bad weather conditions.

As Luciana Kasai, a delivery worker, says:

> We stay in this distress all day long. If it's not distress because there's no rush; it's distress because you must do a lot, you have to rush, because otherwise they'll complain about you, and you'll be the one who suffers. (Pessoa Masson and Santos Oliveira 2021)

Moreover, the strong feeling of uncertainty about the future, accentuated by the epistemological, financial, and health risks we mentioned earlier, makes room for frequent anxiety crises among workers, with their characteristic bodily manifestations, such as insomnia, tachycardia, or panic attacks. As anxiety, according to a Freudian-Lacanian perspective, is understood as a disorder carried out by processes of subjective destitution, we can here identify the existence of 'subjective

risks'. Indeed, not having a minimum guaranteed income and job permanence, being shaken every time by a new accusation of arbitrary suspension or cancellation of 'partner' accounts, and the almost complete isolation in the carrying out of work tasks. In sum, the exposure of workers to a multiplicity of risks weakens more and more the confidence and self-esteem that the workers have in themselves. Added to this is the daily exposure to multiple forms of violence, including racial or gender-based violence or xenophobia (frequently concerning immigrant workers), competition among colleagues, and, during a crisis like the coronavirus pandemic, the constant fear of getting infected.

The hyper-individualization of tasks associated with algorithmic work management contributes to intensifying the competitive struggle between workers, encouraging the transformation of ties into a myriad of fragmented competitors who fight among themselves to increase individual profits. This hyper-individualization also expresses a process of "political psychologization of work" in which social problems, such as unemployment or job insecurity, are attributed to personal or psychological causes, such as the worker's lack of entrepreneurial attitudes (Morales Muñoz 2020). The companies dictate the rules, charge commissions (and keep a proportion of the worker's profit), establish forms and times of payment and shipping, and even decide on promotions without consulting the worker, who must assume the costs. One example of such cases would be the '2 x 1' deliveries in the Rappi app, in which the worker must make two deliveries for the price of one. As can be seen, this scheme allows for little autonomy or freedom. Rather than an entrepreneur, this is a digitally precarious worker (Scasserra 2019).

In sum, from the analysis of the experience of work in platform economies, we see that algorithmic control produces effects on the subjectivity of workers, not only through entrepreneurial discourse or through the very organization of tasks in the workplace, but also by encouraging workers to consider themselves in the terms in which the control mechanisms define them, i.e. to monitor their behaviour to meet the company's goals and to extend these conduct norms to their colleagues. Neoliberal societal values such as self-regulation and entrepreneurship are combined with symbolic traditional values such as the struggle for survival and the personal strength to legitimize the model of corporate de-responsibilization. In the pandemic, these values have been explicitly promoted by the platform companies: for instance, in Argentina, the company Rappi launched an advertising campaign to promote its workers as "Rappi Heroes" of the pandemic, to which the Association of Platform Personnel (APP) replied with the statement: "we are not heroes but workers claiming our rights" (Brunetto 2020).

However, despite these attempts at the 'desymbolization' of social bonds and ties of camaraderie among workers, workers have not ceased to experiment with forms of counterstrategies and mutual protection: from sabotage actions, private chat groups, online forums, and the blocking of applications, to more complex

practices of cooperative self-organization or different struggles for unionization and recognition as workers, not as 'partners'. Examples of these strategies are the creation of the APP union in Argentina after a series of strikes due to unjustified suspensions in 2018 (Del Bono 2019; Negri 2020); or the delivery workers' strike called *breque dos apps* (apps stoppage) occurring throughout Brazil, which so far has engaged workers in Porto Alegre, Belém, Manaus, Niterói, São Paulo, São José dos Campos, Atibaia, Ribeirão Preto, Jundiaí, Paulínia, São Carlos, etc. Those cases show that digital control over working conditions is not a natural law, but a new space for class struggle. Through various tools of struggle, diverse political experiences, and the participation or disinterest of the big unions, the riders are beginning to become an active political subject under the demand to be recognized as workers with rights.

On Authoritarian Neoliberalism

In Brazil and Argentina, the authoritarian wave that emerged in the last few years has been feeding on the failure of the development promises of social inclusion via consumerism and political rights (Féliz 2021). Instead of that perspective, both the discursive matrices of the Bolsonaro and Macri regimes praise entrepreneurial merits while concurring with the idea of social policies being responsible for national economic crises, whether through the overspending of public funds or by stimulating vagrancy among the population (Catanzaro and Ipar 2017). Based on these justifications, governments have been setting up precarization labour policies combined with the systematic demolition of public funding for social welfare. The wage society linked to the import substitution model no longer exists and the growth of non-wage forms of work, related to the digital economy, is the last expression of this transformation. These platform companies have been developing new strategies of accumulation different from those of the former industrial mode of production, strategies that entangle algorithm management as new practices of governing subjectivities at work, which are at the core of the new neoliberal governmentality.

Indeed, they also promote the reconfiguration of the workers' libidinal economy, that is, of the workers' psychic investments in social models responsible for socializing the individual according to norms of behaviour, moral evaluation, and emotional disposition. That libidinal economy of platform capitalism involves both a configuration of the worker's subjectivity in conformity with those capitalist patterns and a psychic economy, understood as "the contemporary investment—techno-scientific, economic, and social—in algorithmic processes of capturing and using psychic and emotional information extracted from our data and actions on digital platforms" (Bruno et al. 2019, 21). Inversely, the algorithmic

power of the platforms not only jeopardizes the psycho-emotional data generated by subjects from their interaction with or through the platforms but also *produces psychological designs* both at behavioural levels and within the subjective dynamics of identification and desire.

Due to such implications, we are convinced that these new techno-political developments should be considered in the current debates on the rise of authoritarianism around the world and on the so-called crisis of democracies. In such debates, the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' has become recurrent as a means of describing an institutional formation under which the reproduction of capital uses the state apparatus to marginalize and repress political and social opposition rather than seeking their explicit consent or co-optation. Some characteristics of authoritarian neoliberalism that are usually pointed out are, for example, the prioritization of legal mechanisms over debates and democratic participation, the centralization of state activity in the executive branch, the increasing use of state repression against opposing political forces, the intervention of the media, etc. (Bruff and Tansel 2019). However, beyond its theoretical productivity, the debates around this concept are often framed in a perspective focused on state functioning or on the ideological-discursive level, perspectives that risk losing pragmatic and biopolitical dimensions of the exercise of power, and which are key dimensions for understanding the persistence of neoliberalism as political rationality in the era of its hegemonic crisis.

Thus, the analysis of the labour market in these platform economies can make visible how neoliberalism survives when no one believes in its heroic tales of progress and welfare anymore. Constant surveillance, evaluation mechanisms, and unjustified suspensions, anonymization of the relationship with the employer, commands from the algorithmic black box, etc. reveal that the authoritarian face of neoliberalism also has its microphysical expression in the world of work, where ideologies of freedom, autonomy, and self-responsibility coexist with the opacity and arbitrariness of algorithmic management. This contradiction between the authoritarian structure of the workplace, as if reproducing a miniature dictatorship of the "private governments" (Anderson 2017) and its ideological legitimization through individualistic values, is one of the silent and persistent phenomena of the current authoritarian regression. This could mean that authoritarianism is not only an expression of the much-mentioned 'crisis of (liberal) democracy' or a crisis of political representation but will also "entail the permutation and crystallization of neoliberal modes of dehumanization involving *new technologies*" (Gambetti 2021). These new technologies and their ideological effects on working subjectivities pose new tasks, both for critical theory and political counterstrategies.

One of these tasks is to overcome the classical dichotomy of consensus versus coercion, ideology versus repression in the authoritarian crisis of neoliberalism. An example of this can be read in *Capital Hates Everyone: Fascism or Revolution* by

Mauricio Lazzarato, where he criticizes the micropolitical approaches of neoliberalism by arguing that, in its current phase, capitalism reproduces itself not only by subjectivizing, producing embodiments, social recognitions, or tacit agreements but also by civil wars, states of exception, class hatreds and repressive violence (Lazzarato 2021). Although many of his observations on the new fascisms are of great value, Lazzarato still maintains a strict dichotomy between ideology and repression to characterize the current authoritarian moment of neoliberalism. This dichotomization is what we wanted to call into question by considering the working conditions of capitalism in the Global South to show that neoliberalism activates ways of subjectivization and ideological discourses that are, at the same time, methods of control, punishment, and surveillance. As an extreme instance of this, we saw recently in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro how militias have been involved as paramilitary forces of certain platform companies to manage workers through violence and harassment (Liberato 2021). Entrepreneurialism and paramilitary violence work together as the Janus face of new digital capitalism in the Global South.

This workplace-based approach also sheds light on the limits of certain leftist technocratic optimism, which considered that industrial automation and digitalization would lead to a "postcapitalist" society (Mason 2015; Srnicek and Williams 2015). Beyond its fetishization of technology and its misunderstanding of the structural economic trends (Benanav 2021), these perspectives barely focus their analyses on the concrete organization, control, and management of the labour force. Such an analysis would uncover the authoritarian condition of neoliberal governance and, at the same time, would go beyond the liberal understanding of authoritarianism, which conceives it as a conglomerate of values and practices that stand in contrast to the values of modernity—especially liberalism, pluralism, and individualism (Nohlen and Schmidt 1998). In our approach, authoritarianism is neither a kind of 'illiberalism' nor a sociological correlation between authoritarian political choices and factors of social belonging, as the sociologist Seymour Lipset (1959) formulated decades ago through the concept of "working-class authoritarianism". On the contrary, authoritarian neoliberalism rather means the depersonalized digital governmentality of behaviours, desires, and bodies in the name of liberal principles such as freedom, autonomy, or individual responsibility, that work as the structural condition of liberal societies without the legal orbit of the state.

However, a blind spot of the Foucauldian biopolitical approach to governmentality lies in the fact that it does not pay enough attention to the circulation of the libidinal energies linked to the social reproduction of the labour force, nor the psychic malaises caused and exploited by algorithmic management within workplaces. As the analysis of the working conditions in the platform economies showed, a critical theory of authoritarian neoliberalism needs to consider the different expressions and symptoms of anxiety, depression, anguish, and phobias as a social and political phenomenon linked to the new digital phase of neoliberal governmentality

(Exposto and Rodriguez Varela 2021). Algorithmic management, the acceleration of informational processes, the virtualization of social relations, and the alienation of the financialized economy are all facets of neoliberal transformations that impact our subjectivities in the form of psychological and somatic pathologies. Contemporary capitalism puts our subjectivity, desires, emotions, and cognitive capacities to work to produce value under conditions of social and political inequalities and, at the same time, it individualizes and privatizes the costs and burdens of such processes (Safatle 2021). Therefore, the politicization of these psychosomatic malaises is a key part of the struggle against the combination of biopolitical management and meritocratic ideologies carried out by authoritarian neoliberalism.

Conclusions

In this chapter we wanted to approach the relationship between authoritarianism and neoliberalism at the level of practices located in the sphere of labour-management and its impact on the process of subjectivization, taking as an example the working conditions in platform economies in Argentina and Brazil. This analysis has shown that the connection between authoritarianism and neoliberalism works out not only at the level of ideas, political formations, or state regulations but also at the level of the social technologies of control and management of workers' subjectivities. However, we did not pretend to explain the so-called authoritarian turn nor a political analysis of why Macri came to power in Argentina or Bolsonaro in Brazil, since we consider that the connection between the sphere of practices 'from below' and the sphere of macro-political transformations requires multiple epistemological and historical mediations, which go beyond the boundaries of this work and our capacities. Our purpose was rather to shed light on some hidden aspects of the capitalist structural trends that operate as practical rationality and also as symbolic and social conditions for political subjectivization, aspects that should be taken into account when analysing and contesting the current authoritarian turn of neoliberalism.

However, we consider it necessary to keep exploring hypotheses that look for those connections between neoliberalism at the biopolitical level and the sphere of political culture and political transformations. It seems to us that reflection on the change in working conditions and its effects on subjectivities is key to understanding our current political moment. For that, it would be necessary to recover the analysis of the world of work in order to rethink the often mentioned 'crisis of democracy' and the 'authoritarian turn'. This task was recently pointed out by the philosopher Axel Honneth (2021) when he said that "one of the major shortcomings of almost all theories of democracy is to keep forgetting that most members of the sovereign they loudly invoke are working subjects". In this sense, we should

venture to explore hypotheses that raise the questions of whether neoliberal precarization, hyper-exploitation, and depersonalized management of labour would not be undermining the symbolic and subjective conditions of democratic relations at the political level; whether the neoliberal governmentality of work is not somehow connected with political apathy and disenchantment, with the attack on solidarities and symbolic bonds, and with forms of de-subjectivization, the symptoms of which we are currently seeing as a political emergence.

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