

Austerity Programs in Argentina and the Structural Continuity of Extractivism: A Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

The government that took office in Argentina in December 2015 shaped a mode of development oriented toward finance and extractivism, trade and capital liberalization, and austerity policies. One of the main goals was to reduce the fiscal deficit and to lower domestic production costs in order to increase international competitiveness. Many measures implemented, such as the pension reform of 2017, budget cuts in gender-sensitive areas, and the change in the nature of social policies, had a differential impact on women and LGBT people when compared to men. However, beyond the measures taken by a particular government, the characteristics of extractivism and land concentration are structural dimensions with profound biases in their impacts in terms of gender.

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Introduction

A feminist reading of economics is necessary because no science is neutral, just as no knowledge is neutral. In this sense, the concept of gender is relevant because it is a category that reveals to us a notion about social relations of power; inequality is not a thing of women, and gender is not the same as women. These power relations interact with others, such as racial, ethnic, and age relations, which comprise different bodies with different psychic and motor capacities and imply dynamics of discrimination and subordination and the creation of states of ‘normality,’ which become social stereotypes. Incorporating the notion of gender in economic analysis elucidates not only social but also economic structures and dynamics and helps us to think how gender relations, which structure social relations, have concrete effects.

The past four decades in Argentina were characterized by a mode of development, based on the exploitation of ‘comparative advantages’ and export-oriented development, with a decreasing share of autonomy from the world market within the main axes of policies. The different governments that followed one another during these 40 years maintained this characterization as a structural axis, but they maintained it with different tones that colored each stage differently within this long period. Such is the case that, after several years of ultra-neoliberalism during the 1990s, the country shifted to a neo-developmental path from 2002 onwards, which was also oriented to the exploitation of comparative advantages but with strong differences regarding the nature of social policies and the importance of the internal market as a relevant space for the valorization of capital.

The arrival in government of a right-wing force at the end of 2015 resumed the previous, more typically neoliberal, path, configuring a mode of development oriented toward finance and extractivism, trade and capital liberalization, and austerity policies. The domestic market was no longer relevant for capital accumulation, so development was a matter of reducing the fiscal deficit as necessary and lowering national production costs in order to increase international competitiveness.

As part of these objectives, a series of measures were carried out that differentially impacted women and LGBT people more than men. This

article will begin by clarifying the neoliberal mode of development in Argentina, its extractivist emphasis, and the role of women therein, before focusing on the 2017 pension reform, budget cuts in gender-sensitive areas, and the change in the nature of social policies. The objective is to analyze the incidence that the austerity program had with respect to women and, in the cases that can be analyzed, to LGBT people in Argentina.

The Differential Impacts of the Development Mode in Argentina

Since the end of the 1970s, a new mode of development was inaugurated in Argentina, which replicated with local nuances, and the same general features were found in all of Latin America. Within the framework of the global transformations that the international crisis of the mid-1970s promoted, multilateral credit organizations demanded the application of a series of structural reforms as a condition for financing and capital inflows throughout the region, in a context of repeated balance of payments crises that the import-substitution process had implied in Latin America.

The result of the implementation of these reforms was integration into the world market by the dilution of national mediations. The interest of transnational capital in Argentina, as in Latin America generally, shifted to the use of cheap labor and untapped natural resources with export-led production (Osorio, 2010). In other words, the emphasis shifted to the extraction and production links of global value chains, leaving the stages that capture the greatest value to the central countries, such as design, marketing, insurance, financing, and logistics.

Since then, this scheme has generally maintained its main characteristics in Argentina, but it has acquired different nuances with the different governments. During Kirchnerism, it was configured as an extractivist neo-developmental model, based on the exploitation of natural resources in the hands of foreign investors, together with a complex system of redistribution of the income of this sector toward both industry and (to a much lesser extent) social policies. This system generated a series of contradictions that reached their maximum tension toward the end of the government. For certain sections of the big bourgeoisie, it was crucial to advance in eliminating them.

The policies applied by *Cambiamos* since it took office, in December 2015, had the effect of resuming the previous path of deepening the

scheme based on the exploitation of natural resources and financial valorization. The possible ‘contradictions’ that existed during Kirchnerism around the role of industry and social policy (beyond the results) were swept away by a battery of policies that reversed and deepened the general positions of winners and losers within the economic structure. Synthetically, it can be said that the development mode of *Cambiamos* was based on four major guidelines:

- deepening of the extractivist structure of production, via shale oil and gas production in *Vaca Muerta*, reduction of retentions to the agro-export complex, and elimination of the requirement for exporters to liquidate foreign currency;
- financialization of economic structure by reliance on indebtedness, high interest rates, and the *carry trade* mechanism, or financial bicycle;
- opening and deregulation of external accounts by the elimination of exchange controls and regulation on capital movements, and by bilateral investment treaties; and
- austerity policies by means of cuts in science and technology; under-execution of social and health expenditure items; and real reductions in salaries, pensions, and social allowances.

Although this study will concentrate on the fourth point, the first three also have differential impacts on the bodies of women and LGBT people. In the case of the deepening of extractivism, this process, already initiated since the previous government, brought with it the proliferation of socio-environmental conflicts derived from the form and intensity of the exploitation of resources (Costantino & Gamallo, 2015). As the ecofeminist perspectives indicate, these conflicts are usually led by women, not because they have innate ecological awareness (derived from a maternal instinct), but because, culturally, the role assigned to women is that of caregiver within the family economy. The sexual division of labor and gender stereotypes are, therefore, those that determine women’s greater ecological awareness and their greater presence in environmental conflicts.

Second, the financialization of the economic structure also has a differential impact on women. Along with public indebtedness, in recent years, there has been an exponential increase in private debt and, above all, in the debt of the popular sectors, through public credit, to the beneficiaries of the National Administration of Social Security (*Administración Nacional de la Seguridad Social*, ANSES),¹ or private

credit (microcredit financial companies). As Cavallero and Gago (2019) affirm, these ultra-indebted popular sectors are highly feminized and enter these circuits of debt to cover subsistence and social reproduction expenses that the neoliberal state ceased to provide and that their incomes do not cover.

Third, the liberalization of foreign trade also has a differential impact. This liberalization implies the smallest possible fiscal space for the implementation of social and public policies with a gender perspective, due to the fall in income from the opening and deregulation of external accounts. Moreover, feminist economists such as Elson (1995, 1998), van Staveren (2005), Fontana (2006) and Razavi (2009), among others, have proposed various approaches and methodologies to analyze the existence of the differentiated effects of trade policy liberalization on women. The coercion of trade and investment policies by corporate power and through corporate capture by the state favors the reduction of labor costs that affects all workers and promotes downward social protections in pursuit of increasing the exchange of certain markets in order to obtain greater benefits (Lattera et al., 2018).

Land Concentration, Extractivism, and the Role of Women

The continuity and deepening of this mode of extractive development throughout these years has implied a strong process of land concentration, the advance of capital over the land, and the expulsion of thousands of family producers and rural workers from the countryside. Extractivism in agriculture is as a type of natural resource extraction in great volume or high intensity, which is essentially oriented toward export as raw materials without any, or only minimal, processing (Gudynas, 2013). Extractivism, in this sense, applies not only to the traditional mining and hydrocarbon extraction activities but also to the strong specialization that countries like Argentina increasingly have obtained in the production of extensive monocultures, like soy or oil palm.²

While production for export has increased exponentially, half of the farms in the Pampas region have disappeared since the 1980s, and this trend continued both during the 1990s, with an uncompetitive exchange rate in Argentina, and throughout the twenty-first century, with a much more competitive exchange rate and very high international prices throughout the period (Figure 1).

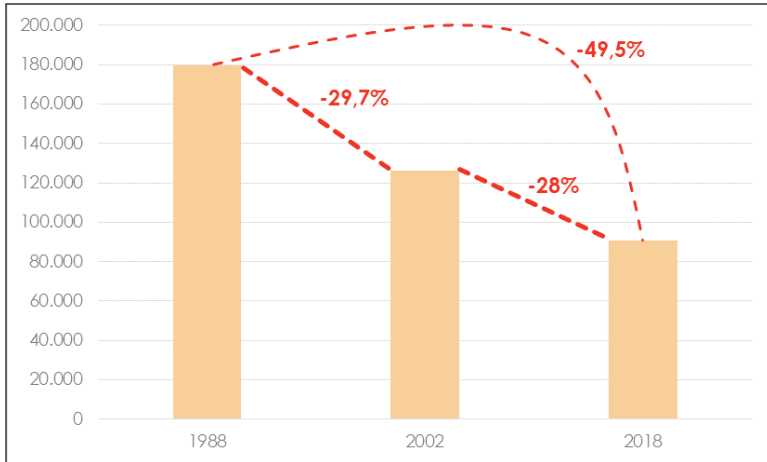


Figure 1. Number of Farms in the PAMPAS REGION and Percent Variation Between Censuses

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Ameghino and Fernández (2019).

The strong land concentration that occurred throughout this period witnessed the disappearance of farms, ranging from 5 ha to 2,500 ha, while farming units of more than 2,500 ha not only grew in number but also, and very strongly, in terms of surface area occupied (Figure 2). By 2018, in the Pampas region of Argentina, the distribution of land was such that farms of more than 1,000 ha owned 63% of the land, while farms of up to 200 ha only covered 7.4%.

This process of land concentration has led to massive rural depopulation. Half of the people who lived on farms in 2002 no longer lived there by 2018. In relative terms, more women than men have migrated: 78% of women producers or partners, that is, women who ran the establishments, no longer live in the countryside (Figure 3). This strong migration can also be seen in rural women workers (both family and nonfamily members).

Clearly, these factors in the migration process far outweigh the concentration of land and may be due to the lack of basic infrastructure in the country's rural territories (education, health, culture, etc.). If women are in charge of care tasks, these deficiencies have a greater impact on them than on men.

Since the 1990s, alongside the advance of capital over agricultural land, there has also been an enormous advance of capital over other extractive activities like mining and oil, both under very intensive and

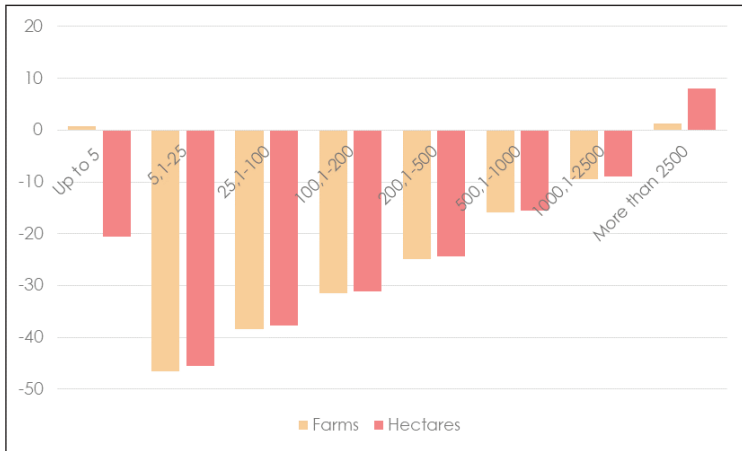


Figure 2. Variation in the Number of Holdings and Surface Area by Size, 2002–2018, Pampas Region

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Ameghino and Fernández (2019).



Figure 3. Variation in Percent of Residents of FFS by Producer, Pampas Region, 2002–2018

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Ameghino and Fernández (2019).

rapid forms of production (Figure 4). The extractive advance of capital on resources also has a differential impact on women. This is particularly true in terms of the environmental consequences that strain women's care workload, as will be elaborated later in the text.

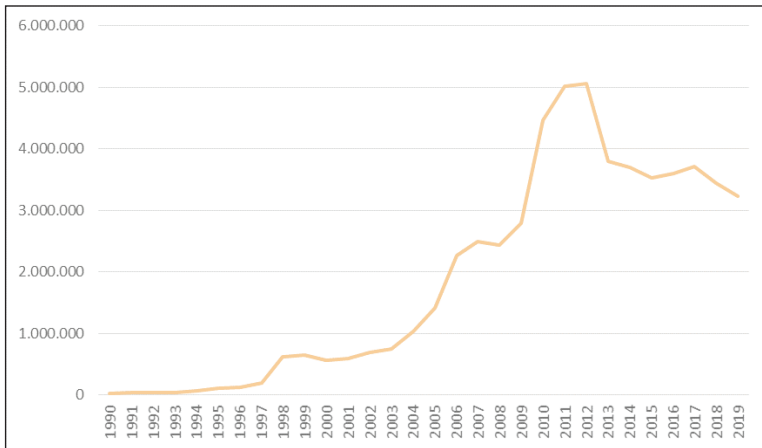


Figure 4. Total Mining and Mining-derived Substance Exports (USD Millions, FOB)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on FAOStat.

The intensity of extractive activities has led, in recent years, to a proliferation of conflicts over who, how, and what natural resources are used and exploited. The socio-environmental conflicts escalated with the installation of mining, hydrocarbon, and soybean projects in dispute over the use of territories (Costantino & Gamallo, 2015). In these cases, it is not only a matter of demand for contamination (for the use of cyanide in mining or agrochemicals in soy) but also for the limitation of access to certain common goods (such as river courses or communal lands) and food sovereignty. The differential impact of these projects (and their derived conflicts) on women is manifold, as follows:

First, these conflicts affect women in the role they play as caregivers for the health and well-being of the family, and, therefore, resistance is also often led by women. In a survey on land conflicts, Bidaseca et al. (2012) showed that during the twenty-first century, in Argentina, more than 60,000 farming families have had problems related to access to land, including incomplete or nonexistent titles, usurpation of peasant and indigenous lands, dispossession, fraud, lack of information, etc. Of all these conflicts surveyed, 80.5% were predominantly fought by women. Even in regions where the displacement of small producers occurs in a 'peaceful' manner through the market, the advance of capital over land also generates multiple conflicts, in this case environmental ones. The case of the 'mothers of Ituzaingó' is one of them, where it is

the women who have gone out to stop the fumigations of the soybean fields that have an impact on the health of their sons and daughters. That is to say, the sexual division of labor and gender roles are the ones that push women's greater ecological awareness and their greater presence in environmental conflicts.

Second, in addition to the extra workload involved in these struggles, women are killed and criminalized for being protagonists in these conflicts. In many cases of displacement of peasants and producers from their land, many women were killed by para-police gangs or hired killers paid by large investors wishing to acquire the land.³ At the same time, the state itself opens criminal cases against women who participate in environmental conflicts, like in the defense of water in the province of Mendoza⁴ or the defense of ancestral territories in Wallmapu.

Third, the integrity of care is reflected in many indigenous communities in the way some organizations conceive of protection for women and indigenous peoples. In this sense, the loss of cultural identity and the weakening of the community and ancestral roles of women that extractivism brings with it violates the cultural and spiritual identity of the territories of native peoples and peasant communities, which breaks the social fabric, family ties, and organizational and community ties (Rico et al., 2011). In the case of women, who play the role of ancestral authorities for their communities, they are cut off from being able to exercise their activity due to the occupation of their lands and their limited access to forests, riverbeds, and medicinal plants used for treatment and cure.

Fourth, highly masculinized environments in the areas where extractive projects are developed also lead to an increase in trafficking and sexual exploitation of women, as well as an increase in the punitive treatment of local sex workers. The province of Neuquén (where the *Vaca Muerta* deposit is located) as well as the whole of Patagonia are the main destinations of victims of sexual exploitation in Argentina.

Finally, there is the differential impact that extractivism generates on women because of land-use change. Both the displacement of traditional crops by commodities and the deterioration and hoarding of resources derived from mining and hydrocarbon activities have increasingly reduced production for self-consumption by many women in Latin America. In Costantino (2019), it was observed that the process of trade liberalization and economic deregulation applied in Argentina since the end of the 1970s, but more rapidly from the 1990s, produced a considerable increase in the production of many agricultural goods that were assumed to be highly profitable at the international level (such as

soy and corn) and a decrease in the production of many others that were part of the population's diet (such as meat, wheat, and some vegetables). All these caused a change in the food basket, which explains, in part, the poor nutritional performance of the population. Since women are responsible for the care tasks related to family nutrition, they are under pressure in the face of these trends.

Living Conditions of Women and LGTBIQ People in Argentina

Analyzing living conditions from the perspective of feminist economics leads to three questions. First, incorporating the notion of gender into economic analysis helps us to think about how gender relations, which are power relations that structure social relations, have concrete effects not only on social but also on economic structures and dynamics (Laterra, 2016). These power relations interact with others—such as racial, ethnic, and age relations, which comprise different bodies with different psychic and motor capacities—that imply dynamics of discrimination and subordination, and the creation of states of ‘normality’ that become social stereotypes. Second, feminist economics enables us to question the definition and the limits of the concept of work: it does not refer only to that used for the production of goods and services with economic value in the market (the orthodox definition of work in economics) but also to that which is necessary for the daily reproduction of life. A third issue, derived from the previous one, is to make visible the systemic economic role of domestic work and care in the daily reproduction of life.

So, we could not analyze people's living conditions from this perspective without taking into account the social organization of care (SOC) that shapes the patriarchal system of sexual distribution of paid and unpaid work. The SOC refers to the way in which families, the state, the market, and the community interrelate to produce and distribute care (Enríquez & Pautassi, 2014), highlighting and identifying the elements and dimensions that feed the reproduction of inequalities. The SOC is a determining factor in the manifestations of inequality, since it determines, among other factors, the time available for people to participate in the world of work. Evidence shows that SOC in our societies, and particularly in Latin American countries, are unequal and unjust (Enríquez, 2007; Esquivel et al., 2012; ILO-UNDP, 2009; Lupica, 2010).

The latest available information on unpaid work and time use in Argentina referring to urban conglomerates in 2013 according to

Permanent Household Survey-National Institute of Statistics and Census (EPH-INDEC) shows that women are involved in 88.9% of unpaid domestic and care tasks, while men are involved in 57.9% of unpaid domestic and care tasks. In addition, women spend an average of 6.4 h a day on these activities, while men spend almost half, or 3.4 hours. The differential burden between men and women is substantial. This work, furthermore, is generated and privatized: it is thought of as an obligation for women and considered as the private sphere of the household. However, it is important to recognize two aspects of this private sphere. On the one hand, there are households with economic resources that buy care work in the market, mainly from other women who provide it, in the form of services or in the form of products. On the other hand, many aspects of care are supplemented by deriving such work in feminized affiliate relationships (girls, adolescents, sisters, cousins, mothers, grandmothers, aunts) or in community relationships. Another face is the unequal distribution between households and the rest of the SOC actors. In this sense, the market participates in a very segmented way, since only those households that can buy care have access to these services. The state also participates in a very subsidiary manner, intervening in very specific sectors of care like education or health to compensate those households that, for whatever reasons, are unable to meet their care needs. The literature on the subject defines the unjust distribution of domestic work and care as a vector of reproduction of inequality (Enríquez & Marzonetto, 2015).

The difficulties of access to the labor market, such as different labor force participation, the wage gap, and the dynamics of horizontal and vertical segregation, are based on this unequal and nodal distribution of time in order to think about the living conditions of cis, trans, and transvestite women.

In this sense, the absence of labor policies for these sectors of the population, added to the recession in which Argentine economy was immersed, is reflected in the deepening of structural gender inequalities in the world of paid work.

The situation of cis women and LGBT people in the labor market is structurally more precarious than that of heterosexual cis men. In general, they have lower activity rates, higher unemployment rates, a higher incidence of informality, and a higher proportion of part-time jobs. In times of crisis and economic recession, these inequalities deepen.

With respect to the activity rate, although cis women have increased their participation in the labor market in the past 30 years, the difference remains important: the activity rates of cis women are around 20% below

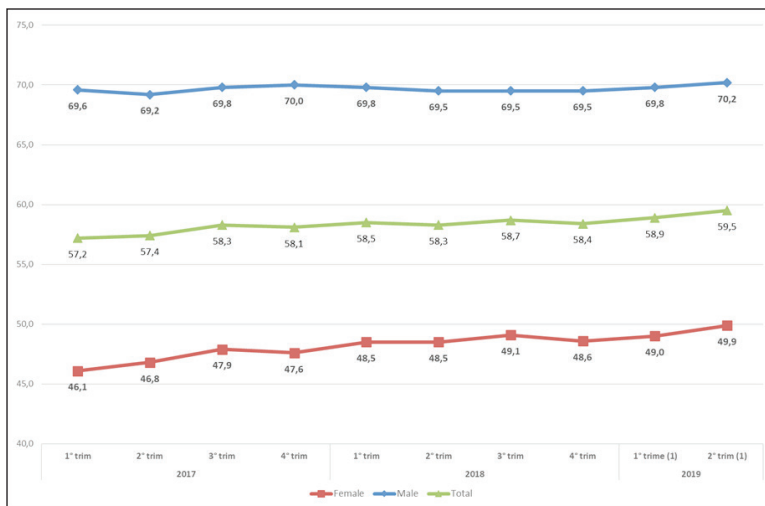


Figure 5. Activity Rate by Sex and Total Population, 31 Urban Agglomerates

Source: Authors' elaboration based on EPH-INDEC.

(I) Provisional data.

that of cis men; as shown in Figure 5, these are around 46.1% and 69.6%, respectively, in 2017 and up to 49.9% and 70.2%, respectively, in 2019. It is clear that toward the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019, when the recession was deepening, the activity rate of women reached almost 50%. This increase in the rate of activity among women, even in contexts of economic crisis, is usually explained by the ‘additional worker’ theory, whereby women enter the labor market to recompose or sustain family income (Águila, 2015).

In recent years, there have been increases in the unemployment rate, with gaps being sustained between cis women and men. From the first quarter of 2017 to the second quarter of 2019, the unemployment rate rose from 9.2% to 10.6%. The gender gap was sustained between 1.3% (the first quarter of 2017) and 1% (the second quarter of 2019), with peaks of 2.7 points in the third quarter of 2018. By the second quarter of 2019, the average unemployment rate was 10.6%, while more than 11 out of 100 women were unemployed and were looking for work, and more than 10 out of 100 men were in the same situation. Reviewing these data for age ranges is even more disturbing. As can be seen in Figure 6, cis women over the age of 30 years had unemployment rates of 7.6% by mid-2019, while younger women had unemployment rates of 23.4%. This

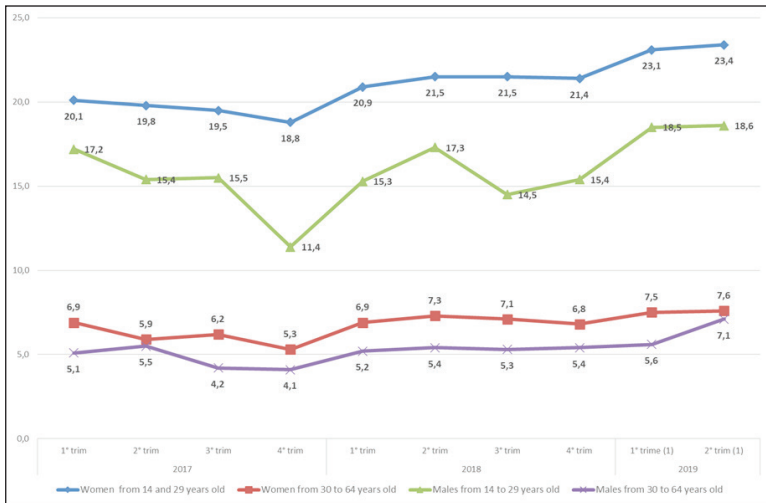


Figure 6. Unemployment Rate by Age Group and Sex, 31 Urban Agglomerates

Source: Authors' elaboration based on EPH-INDEC.

(¹) Provisional data.

indicator is even higher than the already high unemployment rate of young cis males (with rates of 18.6%). Men over 30 years are the best placed in the labor market, with an unemployment rate of 7.1% and participation rate of 91.4%.

According to Shokida (2018), the income gap between 2017 and 2018 was stable at around 25%. By the third quarter of 2017, men received US\$14,897.9 and women US\$11,085. For the same quarter of 2018, the average income for men was US\$18,537.9, and, for women, it was US\$13,860.6. This difference in income, coupled with the greater difficulties of cis women, trans people and those who do not adjust to heteronormativity in accessing jobs and social protection benefits, and in broader terms in accessing and controlling economic resources, explains the evident sustained process of impoverishment. In fact, with reference to income distribution data (EPH-INDEC), by the first quarter of 2017, cis women accounted for 68% of the lowest income decile, where 63.2% of those incomes are nonworking. In the highest income decile, 37% were cis women. By the second quarter of 2019, women in the lowest decile were 66%, and 56% of their income did not come from earned income. The representation of women in the highest income decile fell to 36%.

Similarly, 27% of Argentine households are single-parent households, of which 84% are headed by women. Within this context, 66% of

households have an income below the poverty line, and 60% of them are headed by women (CEPA, 2019a). With regard to social policies to alleviate poverty, according to the National Survey on Social Structure, 47% of single-parent households headed by women receive the Universal Allowance per Child (AUH) as their main income, in relation to other types of households, placing a predominant place of this policy in the economy of cis women (CEPA, 2019c). These data show only part of the poverty—that of income. That is, the one that gives a perspective on what cannot be obtained due to lack of income. However, feminist economics discusses these indicators as they analyze only income-related factors. In particular, the limits of these indicators are discussed, since single-parent households do not have the same needs, economic arrangements, and time arrangements as those of a typical family, as well as incorporating other factors of poverty incidence like the weight of domestic work and unpaid care in time poverty.⁵ These studies refer to hidden poverty.

With respect to trans people,⁶ a report by the Fundación Huésped and the Asociación de Travestis, Transexuales y Transgéneros de la Argentina (ATTA) in 2014 shows that only 18% of the transvestites and transgender people in their studies (498 people) had access to paid work in a formal employment relationship, noting that only 9.8% contributed to the Argentine pension system (SIPA). While 83.8% of the sample revealed that trans people had some kind of work, 70.7% said they were self-employed, and 5% said they were in unpaid family work. The data in the report showed a precarious employment situation of high insecurity and informality. Likewise, of the 452 transvestites surveyed, only 14.6% mentioned never having performed sex work; the remaining 6 out of 10 participants were linked to sex work. The stigma and discrimination associated with gender identity in the workplace are some of the factors threatening full participation in the labor market along with lack of opportunities: 41.6% of the people reported having felt rejected or having lived through situations of discrimination, and 25% reported being discriminated against by bosses and co-workers.

Finally, in relation to the deepening precariousness of women's living conditions, it is necessary to examine the loss of purchasing power of three central conditional income transfer programs of the period.

First, the AUH is a noncontributory benefit implemented in 2009 for children and adolescents under 18 years of age and children of workers in the informal sector or those of the unemployed. Ninety percent of those who have received it are women (CIPPEC, 2018). This policy includes conditionalities in education and health that are mostly carried

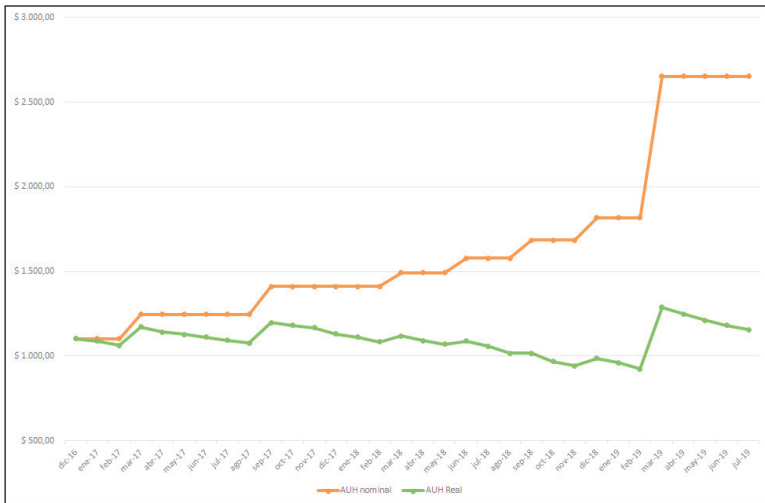


Figure 7. Universal Allowance per Child: Evolution of Nominal and Real Income at December 2016 Prices

Source: Authors' elaboration based on OCEPP data.

out by women. As presented in Figure 7, between 2016 and 2019, the AUH received a nominal increase of 140%, while, in real terms, it meant only 5%. On the other hand, by comparing the amount of the AUH with the costs of covering the food needs of children and adolescents, 90% of them cannot be guaranteed through this benefit (CEPA, 2019a).

A second significant income for women derives from the programs *Argentina Trabaja* and *Ellas Hacen*, and, from 2018, *Hacemos Futuro* (the next section describes these programs and the change in their perspective and social policy in general). An analysis of the funds allocated for these programs shows that throughout the period, they increased in nominal terms by 86%; however, due to the inflationary process in which the country immersed itself, especially since mid-2018, real incomes fell by 19% (see Figure 8).

Finally, regarding the loss of purchasing power of the Complementary Social Wage (SSC), a subsidy implemented by the government of *Cambiamos* within the framework of the social movements' struggle for Social Emergency (also discussed in the next section) deserves mention. Since its implementation in April 2018, the wage suffered a loss of purchasing power of 11%, despite a nominal increase of 88% (see Figure 9).

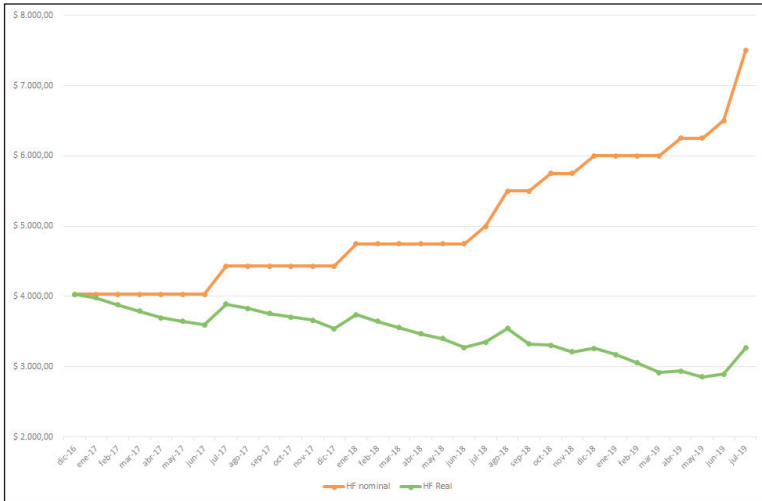


Figure 8. ‘Argentina Trabaja’ and ‘Ellos Hacen/Hacemos Future’: Evolution of Nominal and Real Incomes at December 2016 Prices

Source: Authors’ elaboration based on OCEPP data.

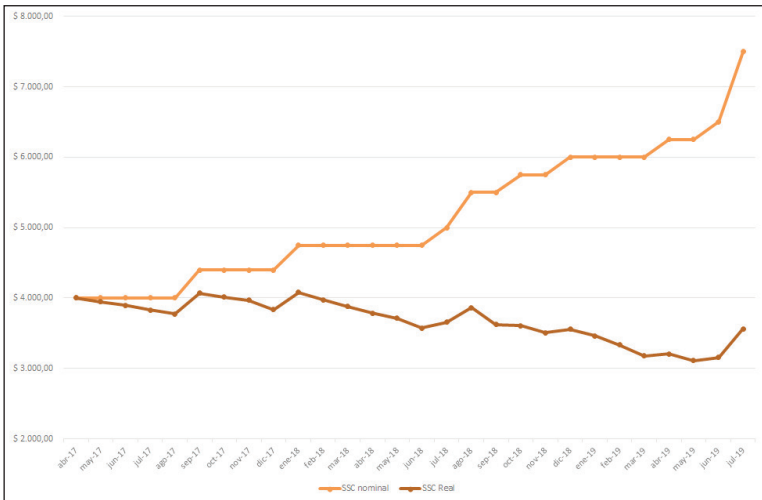


Figure 9. Complementary Social Wage: Evolution of Nominal and Real Incomes at April 2017 Prices

Source: Authors’ elaboration based on OCEPP data.

The above mentioned circumstances enable us to grasp the deepening precariousness of life in terms of income: either because of inequalities in the labor market and the greater difficulties for women in obtaining a wage income due to the increase in inequalities between deciles or because of the loss of purchasing power of the income of the most vulnerable sectors, where women are overrepresented.

Impact of Austerity and Fiscal Adjustment Programs on Development Mode

In unequal societies, public policies implemented by the state are key to reducing inequality gaps, resulting from development models, although they can also contribute to perpetuating or deepening them. However, despite these bids, as Poulantzas (1969) explained, the government always retains a certain degree of autonomy, which allows it to administer different types of concessions to the losing actors (Costantino, 2017). Within the world economy in crisis, Argentina is in the group of countries that is actively proposing and executing the new wave of structural adjustment reforms, austerity programs, and fiscal restraint. However, different analysts have already seen the enormous negative repercussions that these reforms have for people in vulnerable situations, in a clear restriction of access to rights and guarantees of their human rights (Arelovich et al., 2017; Insua, n.d.). In particular, if we incorporate the gender perspective to analyze these policies, the evidence shows that austerity programs have the greatest impact on women and LGBT people because they are the ones who are overrepresented in the precarious areas of the labor market, social protection, available time, and social policy (Lattera et al., 2018).

Pension Reform

Part of the goal set by the *Cambiemos* government was to increase international competitiveness via lower costs. One of the costs that was sought to be lowered throughout the mandate was the cost of labor. Not only did the wages fall in real terms over these 4 years but also all the other costs associated with hiring workers and, among them, social security costs. In the run-up to the pension reform in July 2016, the government decided to abolish a series of laws on pension moratoria

and establish the Single Pension for the Elderly (PUAM). Presented as a progressive measure, it meant the worsening of the living conditions of older adults due to the loss in the calculation of asset readjustments and the disregard for the right to decide on asset readjustments. At the same time, this law put an end to a series of moratoriums. Although the latter did not explicitly include in their wording any reference to women, the law had given symbolic value to the life trajectories of people who historically worked in a precarious and interrupted manner since its inception, and especially to women, thus becoming a tool for obtaining a pension credit in old age. Due to social pressure, the law was not passed with the maximum changes that the government expected. However, it was strongly detrimental to women and trans people, especially those belonging to the lowest strata of society who had had informal and precarious trajectories. Since the formula for updating pensions was the same as for social security benefits, the amounts of the Universal Child Allowance and noncontributory pensions also fell sharply in real terms. Some quantitative data, to take into account the high impact that these reforms had on women's living conditions, show that (ANSES, 2019) by 2019, 63% of the retired population and persons receiving pension in Argentina were women; as of 2015, 79% of those who entered the pension moratorium were women; by 2015, 75.1% of those receiving noncontributory pensions (for old age, disability, or for mothers of seven children) were women; and by 2019, and as a constant over 4 years, 95% of the persons responsible for collecting AUH were women.

PUAM had a direct impact on women's quality of life in different ways (Laterra et al., 2018). In the first place, the monetary level of social security benefits and social allocations deteriorated because of the change in the calculation method that affected social security assets and monetary transfers and reduced the potential increase in social benefits. Second, the reform process excluded informal or precarious workers. Through the signing of the Historical Reparation Law and with the establishment of the Universal Pension for the Elderly (*Pensión Universal para el Adulto Mayor*, PUAM), the different pension moratoria were abolished—those by which many women (as well as LGTB people) had joined the pension system without accumulating sufficient contributory records because of their intermittent labor trajectories, exits and entries into the world of remunerated work, the burdens of care, or having been in care work throughout their lives. This decision was temporarily reversed 3 years after its sanction (nearing its end) after an intense mobilization of women and feminist movements managed to extend the deadline for moratoriums until 2022, but no final solution was

obtained for the life trajectories of people who were in informal employment in the labor market and had the burden of care work.

On the other hand, the establishment of the PUAM, at the same time, as it discouraged the application of the moratorium (since contributory registries must be verified and 60 quotas must be paid retroactively), increased the age necessary to be able to receive the benefit and created a differentiation between those who were able to enter contributory registries and those who were not. Prejudices included an increase in the age at which the benefit was received (from 60 years to 65 years); a decrease in the amount with respect to the minimum pension (80%) (creating discrimination between those who were able to contribute to their work history and those who were not); and incompatibility with the receipt of another social benefit, which could only be compatible with the AUH (if someone had the right to obtain a widow's pension, she/he had to choose or renounce the receipt of this benefit). In practice, the principles of equality and nondiscrimination were violated, as, in practice, two minimum assets were created for the older adult population. A minimum for those who had completed 30 years of service with effective contributions and another minimum for those who historically had remained in precarious employment in different ways in relation to the labor market and the sexual division of labor, allowing this practice to continue into adulthood.

Characterization of the Change of Perspective of Social Policy

During the Kirchnerist governments, starting in 2003, social policy was oriented through work to improve the living conditions of the popular sectors. This broadening of labor horizons was achieved through the promotion of, at first, associative work (in small groups) through programs such as *Manos a la Obra* (Let Us Get to Work), which consisted of granting a subsidy in capital goods and inputs to create or strengthen a productive enterprise. This strategy was strongly accompanied by the promotion of microcredit. Later, social policy was reconfigured into the Program of Social Inclusion with Work (*Programa de Ingreso Social con Trabajo*, PRIST), whose main line was *Argentina Trabaja* (Argentina Works), which, unlike the traditional conditional income transfer programs, proposed remuneration through work cooperatives. Low-complexity works, maintenance of green spaces, and neighborhood improvement works were carried out, as well as training in trades and educational terminals.

Since 2013, the program incorporates the line *Ellas Hacen* (Women Who Do), aimed specifically at women and trans people in situations of vulnerability or gender violence, managed to improve the living conditions of many of them. Training in traditionally nonfeminized trades (blacksmithing, bricklaying, carpentry), compulsory completion of education, and gender training through diplomas and technical courses issued by National Universities were promoted, especially the strengthening of community ties among women. These ties allowed for organization in the neighborhoods, the support of projects in production and commercialization, the continuity in studies, and, above all, the support for themselves. It is important to mention that many authors have criticized the program, both in its design and in its implementation: the compulsive association, the lack of training in issues of associativity, and the lack of democratic instances, among others.

When the new government assumed governance, the PRIST lines began to change (Hopp, 2017), emphasizing their non-training character for employability. In December 2017, the Social Emergency was declared and sanctioned by law, strongly promoted by social organizations, in particular, the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy (CTEP), which included many territorial organizations. This law deepened the transformation of social policy carried out so far with respect to situations of social vulnerability. The Law gave rise to the SSC, an individual monetary transfer whose objective was to complete the income of the workers of the Popular Economy, in order to equate it with that of a formal salaried worker. Although it meant a victory for the organizations, the project that was finally approved suffered great modifications of the original proposal presented by them (Hopp, 2017).

As the last key in this process of transforming the social policy of the government of *Cambiamos*, in February 2018, the lines *Ellas Hacen*, *Argentina Trabaja* and *Desde el Barrio* were unified in a new program called *Hacemos Futuro* (We Make the Future). This new program transformed the way work was viewed and the associativity on which the previous ones were based (the cooperative ceased to be the organizing unit) in order to focus on the development of capacities that allow for improving employability and fostering the ‘culture of work.’ *Hacemos Futuro* required, in return for the income received (which the resolution refers to as a subsidy), personal training, implying completion of primary and secondary education or training in trades intended to provide tools for ‘economic autonomy.’ It focused on the individual training of the beneficiaries, and not on the labor trajectory achieved so far (assuming that training was a sufficient condition for labor market insertion). In

addition, all the gender perspective considerations that the *Ellas Hacén* program tried to guarantee in the territories, with its difficulties, were explicitly set aside. The latter included not only training but also the loss of the collective spaces that favored the organization, the strengthening of an identity as workers, and empowerment as subjects of rights.

Budget Cuts in Sensitive Areas for Women and LGBT People

Fiscal policies materialize the economic priorities of governments that allow us to understand who will contribute to sustaining the economy and to whom the government will provide goods or services, that is, how the redistributive role of the state is configured. We understand that while fiscal policies, as an expression of public policies, are not gender-neutral, they are traversed by gender relations, and they can both increase inequalities and challenge them. Analyzing spending policies from a gender perspective is key to understanding distributive equity issues. In this sense, for present purposes, we propose to analyze expenditure succinctly from a gender perspective that does not focus solely on expenditures labeled as such. In particular, in 2018, the government made progress both in disaggregating information and in recognizing more budget items that may affect the specific living conditions of cis women, although the transparency of this information was still insufficient to be able to analyze both the budgets and their execution.

A general analysis of the items that may have a particularly sensitive impact on the growth of unpaid domestic and care work and on the working conditions of cis women shows that, in several sectors, the expenditure of the national public administration has decreased in significant proportions. Public spending fell in highly feminized sectors, such as health (7 out of 10 health sector workers were women), education and culture (7 out of 10 education and cultural sector workers were women), and science and technology (60.2% of the total number of researchers and fellows registered in the unified curriculum registry, or CVAr, were women). In addition, it is the cis women who are mainly responsible for providing and solving the problems surrounding services such as health and education, as well as the provision of water, sewerage, and household sanitation. Budget cuts in these areas make cis women individually or as a community undertake these tasks that the state ceases to provide. The budget for housing and urbanism, an area highly sensitive to housing shortages and property ownership in a country where single-parent households are growing ostensibly, has also decreased. The

downside of these cuts is the more than twofold increase in government-paid public debt services.

When analyzing the specific budget with a gender perspective or what has come to be known as gender-sensitive budgeting, we are faced with a series of difficulties. In the face of Agenda 2030, regarding the international commitments that states must make in terms of transparency of information in order to achieve the objectives of sustainable development, and pressure from civil society, some steps have been taken to begin implementing budgets and monitoring expenditures with a gender perspective. However, we face many ups and downs when it comes to being able to find disaggregated information for analyzing budget headings and the actual execution of such expenditure. The information is still poorly disaggregated, and specific expenditures are within large spending programs; so it does not allow us to analyze the study period in a disaggregated manner, except for some specific programs. It should be noted that the analysis carried out, here, merits greater depth in terms of program content and physical goals. This is just a quantitative analysis at the monetary expenditure level. Such an analysis is worthwhile, although it has only recently become possible to have information available for such an analysis.

In 2018, as part of the presentation of the National Plan for Equal Opportunities and Rights 2018–2020, the National Directorate for Fiscal and Revenue Policy presented the Dialogue Roundtable ‘Towards a Budget with a Gender Perspective,’ with a series of programs aimed specifically at, or with a high impact on, women. Analyzing this set of budgetary allocations, the budget represented a total of 2.29% in 2016, 2.81% in 2017, and 3.6% in 2018, considering the current appropriation allocated.

By 2019, the state made progress in producing information and assigning labels to policies and programs with a possible positive impact on the living conditions of women and LGBT people. The classification is made between programs with a direct impact on society and with an indirect impact on society (actions within the National Public Administration). The budget identified with gender issues amounts to 4.29% of the primary expenditure of the National Public Administration. However, it is not necessarily that more economic resources have been allocated, but that more policies and programs are currently being considered within the labeled analysis that can be identified. In this sense, the constant changes in the consideration of labeled spending and the nomination of programs make it complex to analyze how it affects

the delicate inflationary process that devalues the Argentine peso and restricts the living conditions of the population.

A point to note is that much of the selected expenditure is earmarked to sustain income transfer programs to the population that is most dependent, that is, children and older adults. For example, it is a given that the highest percentage of expenditure is for the Universal Social Protection Allowance (universal child allowance and universal pregnancy allowance), which in all cases accounts to more than 60% of the budget in sensitive expenditure considered. Beyond being the most dynamic expenditure in terms of nominal increases over the years, a CEPA (2019b) report warns that if one analyzes the purchasing power of the AUH in terms of the Basic Food Basket per equivalent adult, it emerges that it is not enough to cover the minimum requirements of children and adolescents from the age of 2 years. What is received monthly from the AUH only exceeds the basket for children aged 0–1 year; in the case of adolescents aged 17 years, it only covers 41–55% of the basket (CEPA, 2019b).

However, if we look at the two specific programs aimed at the monetary autonomy of the most vulnerable cis women, *Ellas Hacen/Hacemos Futuro* and the Noncontributory Pensions for mothers of seven or more children, both programs do not exceed real year-on-year inflation for the last 2 years of analysis, and each represents 1% of total budgeted expenditure. Both items make visible the income poverty of women and the need to have an economic income to support them and their dependents, bearing in mind that the unemployment rate among young people is more than 20% in Argentina. In this regard, the Latin American Team on Justice and Gender (ELA) observes that, while access, permanence, and promotion to the labor market under equal conditions and the rights of cis women are a key focus for overcoming the wage gap, the allocated investment is insignificant, which hardly results in the dedication needed to contribute to the transformation of structural barriers to equal opportunities and rights in the world of work (ELA, 2018). In this sense, the negligence with which the State has omitted to guarantee equal opportunities and access to work for transvestites, as well as LGBT people, is worrying. In this sense, it is worrisome that no progress was made at all in guaranteeing the approval and execution of the transvestite and transgender work quota in the provinces, as well as the gender identity law and the effective social protection needed by the trans population that is discriminated against and violated in their living conditions. In order to advance in disrupting structural conditions to address the structural conditions that sustain inequalities, including equitable access to

the world of work, it is essential to promote a fairer SOC, taking into account both the reorganization of the sexual division of labor and the division of labor among the different actors in care. These policies should address the necessary universality of access to care times, care money, and care infrastructure (ELA, 2018, p. 7), not rights derived from people's employment status (ELA, 2018).

With respect to the programs on sexual health and responsible procreation at the same time as the Comprehensive Sexual Education Program, the discussion on the legal interruption of pregnancy in 2018 in Congress and in society was central to putting sexual and reproductive rights on the table in Argentina. Both programs increased by 50% and 369%, respectively, although inflation for 2018 reached 47.6%, and in terms of the total budget, they represent less than 0.01%. It should be noted that, in Argentina, there are 700,000 births per year, an adolescent has a child every 6 min and, per day, seven babies are born to girls under the age of 15 years. A total of 16% come from adolescents between the ages of 15 years and 19 years (in some provinces, this is equivalent to 25%) and more than 3,000 are girls between the ages of 10–13 years. A total of 69% of those teenagers had not planned the pregnancy.

In the case of the program that referred to the Fight Against AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Infectious Diseases, although the budget in 2018–2019 remained constant in real terms according to inflation (it had an increase of 48.6%), it was denounced by patients living with HIV and sexually transmitted infections for the lack of medicines needed to carry out their treatments. During the whole period, the state had under-executed the budget in this item by 31, 16, and 31%, respectively, for the years from 2016 to 2018. Under the slogan *#SinMedicamentosNosMorimos* (*#WithoutMedicinesWeDie*), the National Front for the Health of People with HIV has denounced the lack of medicines for people with HIV. By 2019, the delivery of medication to more than 15,000 people living with HIV was in jeopardy. There were also reports of the delivery of expired medication or the abrupt change of medication for patients who were undergoing prolonged treatment and who needed predictability of treatment, since sudden changes in their absence would wreak havoc on their health.

If we look at the budget in large items selected by jurisdiction such as health, education, work, or if we take into account the budget items of expenditure labeled with a gender perspective, we can conclude that between 2015 and 2018, public debt services, that is 7.7% and 16.8% of the total expenditure of the National Public Administration, respectively,

far exceeded the expenditure allocated to sensitive social protection to reverse gender inequalities.

Conclusions

In this article, we try to give an overview of some structural conditions in which cis women and modestly LGTB people find themselves in the Argentine economy and how they were impacted by the austerity policies applied during the government administration that took office in December 2015.

In spite of the structural continuity of the development mode in Argentina in the past 40 years, the deepening of the scheme based on the exploitation of natural resources and the financial valorization during the *Cambiemos* administration have had a strong impact on the bodies of women and LGTB people. The impact is evident in the repression of territorial bodies both in the wave of socio-environmental conflicts derived from the struggles, headed mostly by cis women, to avoid the advance of capital over the territories, and in the streets, in the offensive against structural adjustment and the conservative advance in which sexual repression is included, the advance of gender ideology, and the increase of transphobia, among others. It is notable, in this sense, that the greatest actor of unity and dynamism in social conflict has been feminisms with massive demonstrations in the streets.

The impact is also evident in the reallocation of state resources to subsidize financial and speculative capital to the detriment of the sustainability of social protection policies. In this sense, one of the main objectives of the development model of *Cambiemos* was to increase

Table I. National Public Administration Expenditure, Percent of Total Expenditure, Selected Items

	2015	2018
Health	3.9	3.6
Education and Culture	6.9	5.8
Science and Technology	1.5	1.1
Work	0.4	0.2
Housing and Urbanism	2.1	1.1
Potable Water and Sewerage	1.1	0.6
Public Debt Service	7.7	16.8

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the Ministry of Finance.

international competitiveness by making labor cheaper. For this purpose, a series of measures were carried out that differentially impacted women and LGBT people more than men. The (covert) pension reform of 2016–2017, budget cuts in gender-sensitive areas, and the change in the nature of social policies are some of the examples analyzed earlier.

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Notes

1. Time poverty is a concept that refers to excess hours of work, whether paid or unpaid, and involves very low levels of recreation or free time, since the time when not working is barely enough to carry out the activities required for personal care (sleeping, eating, showering, resting) (Maier, 2017).
2. ‘In the last few years, almost eight million ANSES credits have been delivered, whose beneficiaries used the money to make home repairs, face unforeseen expenses or pay more expensive debts’; see <https://www.infobae.com/economia/2019/04/17/en-el-primer-dia-la-anses-recibio-mas-de-40-mil-solicitudes-para-la-nueva-linea-de-creditos/>
3. As Giraldo (2019, p. 26) has argued: ‘[t]here are many examples of agro-extractivism, but perhaps it is enough to cite the case of soy. To produce a ton of soy in the manner of the “green deserts” that have been spreading across the fields of the global South since the dawn of the millennium, it is necessary to extract 16 kilograms of calcium, 9 of magnesium, 7 of sulfur, 8 of phosphorus, 33 of potassium, and 80 of nitrogen. These chemical elements are not paid back to the soil and generate its degradation, rapidly undermining the bases required for life to reproduce.’
4. ‘Murders in pursuit of agribusiness’; see <https://www.darioaranda.com.ar/2013/01/asesinatos-en-el-campo-en-pos-del-agronegocio/>
5. ‘Persecution of those who defended the water in Mendoza continues’; see <https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Video-Continua-la-persecucion-a-quienes-defendieron-el-agua-en-Mendoza>
6. There are no official statistics on the employment situation of transgender, transvestites, lesbians, and gays. From the official organism, the National

Institute of Statistics and Censuses (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos*, INDEC), there only exists a report for the year 2012, elaborated with INADI; see INDEC (2012).

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