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Sociopolitical development of female migrant domestic workers in Southern Spain: A qualitative study of a pathway against injustice

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Abstract

Domestic work is a sector characterized by various forms of injustice, prompting some women to embark on a pathway towards activism. Based on the Sociopolitical Development (SPD) framework, this study aims to explore female Latin American migrants' experiences of injustice in the domestic work sector in Spain and how they challenge them, particularly when they become involved in organized collective action. To this end, in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 women of Latin American origin who actively participate in the Association of Domestic Workers of Seville. The qualitative analysis found that being a domestic worker, having experiences of exploitation, discovering rights, receiving rights training, sharing stories of oppression, and engaging in sociopolitical actions are key experiences in guiding migrant women from the acritical and adaptive stages of SPD towards the pre-critical, critical, and liberation ones. Knowledge about these significant life-changing events may be useful for designing interventions aimed at fostering different ways in which oppressed groups can challenge injustice.

KEYWORDS

activism, critical consciousness, domestic workers, life-changing events, migrant women, sociopolitical development

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Spain has witnessed the arrival of an increasing number of migrants over recent decades. In 2020, 413,210 migrants entered the country, most of them from Africa and Latin America (National Statistics Institute, 2021), and about 50% of this population were women. In the labour market, migrant women are considered low-skilled workers and are discriminated against because they come from poor countries. Consequently, their access to the labour market is severely limited (Observatorio Argos, 2019) and they are predominantly relegated to care and household work (Aparicio-Gómez, 2010; Escrivá, 2003). As domestic workers, they often experience oppressive work relationships, low pay, and poor living conditions (Agüero-Collins et al., 2018; Ahonen et al., 2009).

Scarce attention has been paid to date to female migrant domestic workers (FMDWs) who act against injustice and the processes that lead them to collectively overcome work-related oppression are largely unknown. To shed light on this phenomenon, the present study focuses on key experiences that foster women's passage from acceptance and justification of injustice to engagement in sociopolitical actions aimed at bringing about social change. The study aims to determine what significant life events have fostered the liberation of FMDWs in work-related contexts. To this end, we adopted a typological analysis approach to narrative interviews held with female Latin American domestic workers in Southern Spain, in dialogue with the Sociopolitical Development (SPD) framework.

1.1 | FMDWs in Spain

By the end of 2019, about 86% of those registered in the Special Regime for Household Employees were women, with most being of foreign origin (Observatorio Argos, 2018). The tasks performed by FMDWs are viewed as constituting a natural job for women, requiring no specific skills (Madhumati, 2013). They are carried out in the private sphere, where labour relations are often informal, insufficiently regulated, and poorly protected (International Labour Office, 2013). In Spain, domestic workers have been able to register with the social security system since 2012. However, they have no right to claim unemployment or incapacity for work benefits and no right to overtime pay. Their occupational illnesses are not recognized and they enjoy no protection against sexual harassment (Briones et al., 2014). Approximately one third of FMDWs in Spain are in an irregular administrative situation (Ministerio de Igualdad [Ministry of Equality], 2020). Many are expected to send money back home (Ayuso & Pinyol, 2010) and are unaware of their rights as migrants and workers. For reasons such as these, they are willing to accept poor working conditions. For their part, employers take advantage of these situations by normalizing labour exploitation (Fernández-Ocón & López-Olvera, 2009).

Due to their dispersion, isolation, work intensity, labour informality, administrative irregularity, and lack of legal protection, collective organization by FMDWs is severely compromised (International Labour Office, 2013). However, in recent decades, FMDWs in Spain have self-organized and engaged in collective actions in favour of labour improvements. In Seville, the capital of Andalusia, the Association of Domestic Workers of Seville (ADWS) has been leading an increasingly consolidated initiative since 2012. Currently, the ADWS is the only grassroots organization in the city dedicated exclusively to defending the rights of domestic workers. At present, the association has more than 100 members, mainly Latin American women, and offers opportunities for them to learn about their rights and jointly resist the unfair conditions to which they are exposed.

1.2 | Sociopolitical development

Oppression is the state of power relations in which sociopolitical conditions favour some people more than others and hinder the possibility of social actors relating on an equal footing (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). It is therefore a situation in which dominant groups enjoy many opportunities to achieve well-being while limiting the possibilities

and responsiveness of other groups (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999). This situation depends on power and resources being concentrated at the top of social hierarchies through a variety of strategies, including economic exploitation (Moane, 2003).

The experience of oppression often has a negative impact on the individual's psychological functioning (Luque-Ribelles, Herrera-Sánchez, & García-Ramírez, 2017), engendering, for example, a sense of powerlessness through which they may internalize their disadvantaged position and become incapable of initiating actions against injustice (Paloma, Lenzi, Furlanis, Vieno, & García-Ramírez, 2018). However, every human group has the capacity to resist oppression, turning it into the starting point of processes of psychosocial growth. To explain how this occurs in the case of FMDWs, in this paper we use the SPD framework (Watts et al., 1999; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

SPD is the process by which people develop the capacity to critically analyse the conditions in which they live, as well as to understand the practices that oppress them, in order to subsequently engage in actions aimed at their transformation (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). The SPD framework posits that people may start from a place of misinformation about the social forces affecting their lives and move towards sustained, informed, and strategic action (Watts et al., 2003). Central to this process is critical consciousness. This capacity can take the form of a critical analysis of oppressive situations, the emergence of collective identity, and/or political self-efficacy (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). It also lays the groundwork for societal involvement behaviours (Watts & Flanagan, 2007) that produce social change.

SPD occurs in five stages, called acritical, adaptive, pre-critical, critical, and liberation (Watts et al., 1999, 2003). In the first stage, people are unaware of oppression and assume that the social order is fair, as it reflects differences in the capabilities of different groups, particularly the inferiority of those who are oppressed. The second stage is called the adaptation stage because, although people start to question their belief in a just world, they are dominated by the idea that inequality is immutable, so the only possible response is to adapt to reality. In the pre-critical stage, people begin to be concerned about asymmetry and start questioning their adaptive behaviour. They gradually become aware of oppression and the structural processes that maintain it. The critical stage is characterized by a desire to learn more about the origins and forms of injustice, as well as possible strategies for liberation. Finally, in the liberation stage, awareness of the forms of oppression is the dominant trait, accompanied by tangible liberation behaviours. Significant life experiences (understood as specific moments in a person's life in which several factors converge to produce personal change) are fundamental to the passage from one stage to another (Watts et al., 2003).

As can be seen, the SPD is described as a transition from a state of internalized oppression to transformative action. However, Watts et al. (1999) recognized that this unfolding is not as linear as the framework theoretically suggests. In SPD, the authors argue, one can have different points of departure or arrival. Not all people start their development uncritically, nor do they necessarily reach liberation. Thus, for example, Watts et al. (2003) stated that "critical consciousness can lead to different ideological outcomes; strictly speaking, there is no one set of conclusions that everyone should reach" (p. 187). Moreover, it is also necessary to highlight that liberation is not just a state and that, in fact, it is never total: it is always in a continuous state of becoming (Watts, Abdul-Adil, & Pratt, 2002).

The SPD framework was created with young Black men and used in studies of Black youth (Anyiwo, Bañales, Rowley, Watkins, & Richards-Schuster, 2018; Hope & Bañales, 2019; Lozada, Jagers, Smith, Bañales, & Hope, 2017; Watts et al., 2003) and Latin American youth in the United States (Seider et al., 2020). To the best of our knowledge, no research has yet been carried out on the migrant population or specifically on FMDWs, using this framework. However, the SPD framework may shed light on the ways such a population may respond to the injustice they experience. From this perspective, it is possible to transcend the adaptive approach represented by concepts such as coping or resilience and move research and practice towards more empowering notions such as a sense of agency, socio-political control, and activism (Watts & Guessous, 2006). Moreover, this knowledge would allow us to guide the design of interventions aimed at promoting different ways in which oppressed groups can challenge injustice.

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Participants

The researchers contacted the ADWS in the winter of 2019 and presented the study to the Board of Directors. Once approval had been obtained, two of the researchers (JA and TD) participated in several of the organization's activities over the course of 3 months to familiar themselves with the association. With the ADWS's support, interviews were held with 11 women who actively participate in the association. Participants were selected using the maximum variation sampling method, which provides data from a small and heterogeneous group of well-informed participants (Patton, 2014). Participants had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) be a domestic worker from a Latin American country; (b) live in Andalusia; (c) participate or have participated in the ADWS; and (d) self-identify as an activist.

Several women who fit the profile were contacted by e-mail or phone. To demonstrate that potential participants met the inclusion criteria, they completed a demographic questionnaire and a measure of activist identity based on a scale by Klar and Kasser (2009). The latter measure refers to activism as “the behavior of advocating some political cause (...) via any of a large array of possible means, ranging, for example, from institutionalized acts such as starting a petition to unconventional acts such as civil disobedience” (p. 757). The scale includes four items related to self-identification with the activist role. Considering that the maximum total score of the scale is 28, women with rates higher than 20 were selected.

Five of the selected participants ($N = 11$) were from Peru, two were from Colombia, and the rest were from Ecuador, Paraguay, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Their ages ranged from 36 to 59 years ($M = 39$ years). All of them identified as activists in the ADWS, and four were members of the Board of Directors. Two were not members of the ADWS at the time of the study but had been activists in the past. All had arrived in Spain between 1991 and 2017, 10 of them had been granted Spanish citizenship and one had a work permit. Other sociodemographic characteristics can be seen in Table 1. To protect their identity, their names have been changed to pseudonyms of their choosing.

2.2 | Instruments

This is a qualitative research inquiry with a case-study design, and a thematic approach to the data. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with a focus on life history. This technique consists of reconstructing interviewees'

TABLE 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

Interviewees	Nationality	Educational level	Age	Years in Spain	Marital status
Aguapanela	Colombia	Short-cycle tertiary education	55	29	Divorced
Andrea	Peru	Higher secondary education	40	17	Divorced
Carmen	Paraguay	Short-cycle tertiary education	52	17	Married
Doris	Nicaragua	Bachelor's degree	39	3	Single
Gabriela	Peru	Short-cycle tertiary education	47	10	Divorced
Menchu	Colombia	Primary education	59	13	Single
Patricia	Honduras	Short-cycle tertiary education	53	16	Single
Penny	Ecuador	Higher secondary education	56	23	Single
Tatiana	Peru	Bachelor's degree	45	13	Married
Rosenda	Peru	Bachelor's degree	36	13	Divorced
Susana	Peru	Bachelor's degree	56	22	Single

Note: The names used in the table and throughout the article are pseudonyms chosen by the interviewees for the purposes of this paper.

life experiences in order to describe and analyse them (Mertens, 2005). Participants' lives were partially reconstructed during the interviews, prioritizing their work-related experiences and how they had responded to them since their arrival in Spain. Interviews followed a predefined protocol that was then adapted to each interviewee. They included questions about (a) their arrival in Spain (e.g., What happened when you arrived in Spain?); (b) work experiences from arrival to the time of the interview (e.g., How would you describe the first job you had?); (c) responses to work experiences (e.g., What did you do to cope with that situation?); and (d) participation in the ADWS (e.g., How would you describe your experience in the organization?).

2.3 | Procedure

Participants were provided with a summary of the project and an informed consent form. Interviews lasted between 2 and 3 hr, were conducted in Spanish, and were recorded and transcribed in their entirety to facilitate analysis. The interviewers were a man and a woman with experience in qualitative research (T.D. and J.A.). While the woman conducted the interviews, the man offered support throughout the process and made field notes with the participants' explicit agreement. A special effort was made to create a friendly and safe atmosphere for participants, with researchers emphasizing that they were not obliged to recount experiences that they considered too private to share with them. However, many of them evoked deeply personal testimonies and expressed to the interviewers that they felt confident enough to do so.

The data were first analysed using a typological inductive method, which consists of categorizing and classifying the material and reducing it to a series of types representing different moments in the interviewee's history (Martín-García, 1995). Based on a repeated reading of the transcribed material, a preliminary list of related experiences recounted by participants was produced and coded, identifying those that were repeated with a certain degree of frequency. Work-related experiences and participants' reactions to them were selected and organized sequentially. Special attention was paid to identifying those that, in the opinion of the interviewees, triggered relevant changes in their lives.

After considering different theoretical options (e.g., Brodsky & Cattaneo, 2013), we selected the SPD framework to present our results since it resonated with the inductively analysed material. We therefore performed a hybrid analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), namely, a combination of inductive coding and deductive thematization, allowing us to apply theory-driven concepts to the data. To guarantee the accuracy of our interpretations, participants were invited to review the preliminary outcomes of this study, with the resulting feedback suggesting that the outcomes accurately reflected their experiences.

2.4 | Research team and reflexivity

This research was based in Center for Community Research and Action at the Universidad de Sevilla (CESPYD, www.cespyd.es/en), which seeks to increase the power, health, and well-being of unprivileged groups and ethnic minorities in southern Spain. The research team was integrated by a female social worker studying for a Master's Degree in migration (T.D.), and two researchers with a PhD in Social Psychology: a man doing a postdoctoral stay in Seville (J.A.) and a local female professor and researcher (V.P.). Two of the researchers were of Latin American origin (T.D. and J.A.), with experience in qualitative research with unprivileged groups, and staying in Seville for a short period. The third one (V.P.) was a Spanish professor, acting as coordinator of the CESPYD. She has played an active role in supporting community-driven initiatives and has defended the well-being of migrant and refugee groups. The profile of the researchers was carefully examined by the ADWS. Initially, the organization expressed concerns about the academic scope of the study, but agreements were established about the utility of the research for the FMDW. The team expressed its commitment to socialize and discuss the results of the research with the organization.

As T.D. and J.A. shared the same origin with FMDW, the establishment of links based on cultural proximity was facilitated. In a similar vein, T.D.'s gender and previous experience as a caregiver provided a positive link with the participants. On the contrary, J.A.'s gender may have been a problem to establish relations of mutual truth with some participants. However, this difficulty had little effect, as T.D. took on the leading role in data collection and analysis, as well as in the socialization of results. Additionally, the problem diminished significantly after a period of familiarization between J.A., the ADWS, and their members. For her part, V.P. and her team facilitated the approach to the local sector of social organizations, making the connection with the ADWS possible. She also offered key support in the conceptualization of the study's aim and the interpretation of the data (e.g., influencing the selection of the SPD framework for analytical purposes).

3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We identified six life events that allowed the FMDWs in our study to move towards liberation: (a) entry into the domestic work sector, (b) exploitation and abuse, (c) discovery of rights, (d) legal advice and rights training, (e) sharing stories of oppression, and (f) engagement in sociopolitical actions. Each life event is described below in the context of the SPD stage in which it played a key role (see Figure 1).

3.1 | Acritical stage

In the interviewees' narratives, one of their early experiences in Spain was their *entry into the domestic work sector*. Although some participants had worked previously as domestic workers in their native country, for most of them, experience with domestic work began in the host society. In general terms, their narratives revealed a willingness to "work anywhere," as well as a quick realization that domestic service was the only alternative available to them. The following excerpt from the interview with *Patricia* describes her entry into the sector:

I entered [Spain] as a tourist. (...) I arrived (...) in Madrid and from Madrid, I took the [train] to Granada because someone's [a relative] sister was living in Granada, and she had told her [a cousin] that she needed someone to take care of her baby. (...) When she picked me up at the train station, I started talking to her and (...) she told me: the apartment must be cleaned, the house must be cleaned, the baby must be taken care of, and there'll be no going out. And, logically, I had no right to social security because at that time I was undocumented.

Like *Patricia*, participants mostly entered the sector under conditions of live-in labor. This regime offers advantages for many FMDWs, as it enables them to send more money home, since housing and food costs are covered by their employers. It also provides protection for undocumented migrants from checks carried out by the immigration authorities (Raijman, Schammah-Gesser, & Kemp, 2003). However, labour relations under this regime are prone to several types of abuse, including informal contracts, hard work, and confinement (as in *Patricia's* case), as well as low wages and poor living conditions. In all these issues, participants' narratives resonate with previous studies on FMDWs (Briones et al., 2014).

In general terms, the FMDWs participating in our study viewed their entry into the sector acritically. Although one of them reported an immediate rejection of a job in which exploitation was experienced, the majority of participants not identified the experiences described above as negative at the time, but rather either excusing or even feeling gratitude towards their employers. This tendency to excuse the people exploiting them is exemplified in the following excerpt from *Andrea's* interview, in which she talks about her first jobs in Spain:

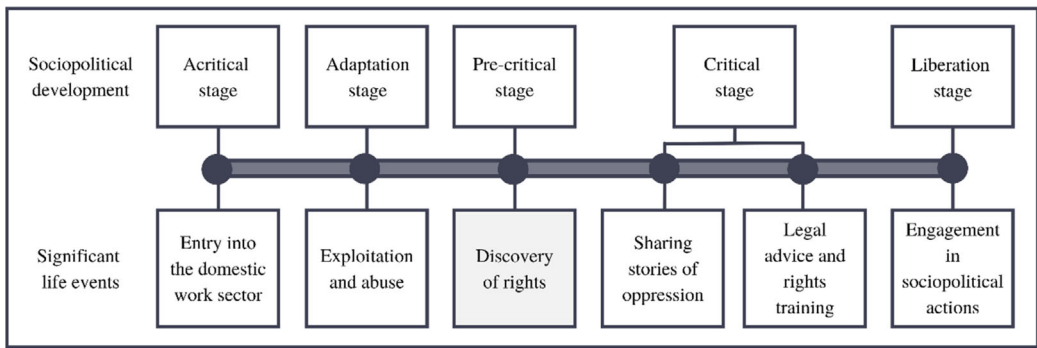


FIGURE 1 The sociopolitical development process followed by female migrant domestic workers. The design of this figure is not intended to indicate that SPD is a linear process. Its aim is only to graphically illustrate the relationship between each significant life event and the stages of the framework

I can't speak badly of my job; of either of the two jobs. I was exploited, (...) I had almost no rest in my first job for four years, I was locked up, but I wasn't treated badly.

Frequently, FMDWs are kept in this acritical state by means of what Alexanian, Sales-Gutierrez, and Camarasa-i-Casals (2015) call the “gratitude trap.” As Escrivá (2003) explains in her study on FMDWs, many women are content with their work situation because they feel it to be less precarious than their former job in their native country. Such a situation suggests that, at this point, many FMDWs are unaware of their oppression (Watts et al., 1999). Upon their arrival in Spain, the majority of interviewees accepted their jobs without viewing their conditions as unfair; indeed, given their status as foreigners, they felt said conditions were appropriate and even positive. Consistently with Watts et al.'s (2003) ideas about the acritical stage, participants' narratives about their entry into the labour market articulate the belief that everyone gets what they deserve and deserves what they get. Only one of the interviewees expressed an early critical stance towards unfair work conditions (a situation understandable in terms of experiences before her trip to Spain) but she could not articulate sociopolitical actions against oppression until she became part of the ADWS.

3.2 | Adaptation stage

Exploitation and abuse were persistent features of interviewees' early experiences in Spain, leading to adaptive beliefs and behaviours. After a certain period, they began to identify these experiences correctly for what they were, although this did not necessarily lead to resistance. The forms of oppression identified in the narratives were mainly in the context of the live-in employee regime. Live-in experiences were those that participants remembered most intensely, probably because, for most, they occurred during their first job and, moreover, represented situations particularly prone to abuse. In this sense, *Aguapanela* refers to domestic work as “*a world of abuse*.”

Participants were particularly shocked by experiences of psychological abuse by employers—such as threats of dismissal or reporting them to the authorities—and explicit physical and sexual violence. Such experiences are reflected in *Doris'* narrative:

... the man (...) was aggressive: he assaulted his wife, he assaulted me, and he always told me: I can do whatever I want to you because, as you're an immigrant here, I can report you and they'll take you out of the country. Of course, at that time, I would just bow my head because I didn't know any better.

In response to these experiences, interviewees mentioned coping strategies such as crying, exercising, and looking for social support. In the absence of a place to live and/or support networks, they often choose to adapt to oppressive jobs, as *Mencha* explains in the following excerpt:

... you come to me and ask me for a job, and I tell you [the conditions]: 'look, this, this and this.' [Then] you tell me: 'it's either acceptable to me or it's not.' Necessity forces my hand and, if I'm really in need of a job, I have to accept it (...) But after I start working, I can't suggest changing the rules, because I accepted the conditions.

The adaptive behaviours mentioned above resonate with previous research on FMDWs in other contexts (Escrivá, 2003). However, such studies do not locate women's coping strategies in the context of an ongoing development process. Such behaviours may be regarded as indicative of FMDWs being in an adaptation stage in which they begin to understand that they are being treated unfairly while still considering their labour relations as something which cannot be changed (Watts et al., 2003). Additional evidence of such a situation can be found in the way FMDWs take advantage of their difficult situation to obtain some personal benefits (Watts et al., 1999, 2003). For example, undocumented migrants adapt by viewing their situation as an opportunity to qualify for a residence permit after having lived in the country for the legally-required period.

3.3 | Pre-critical stage

In participants' narratives, progress to the pre-critical stage was triggered mainly by what we could call their *discovery of their rights*. Two of the interviewees mentioned antecedents of pre-critical thinking due to their experiences in origin, as members of social movement organizations. However, at first, the majority of participants perceived themselves as subjects without rights. It was particularly clear in those who did not have the appropriate immigration papers. However, different experiences in the host country challenged this perception. Informants discovered their rights as migrants and workers in three main ways: (a) by experiencing fair working conditions; (b) by regularizing their migratory status; and (c) thanks to the help provided by social organizations.

In relation to the first pathway to discovering their rights, it is important to note that, although women often experience abusive working conditions, many eventually find "good jobs." In the case of our informants, some employers offered them decent working conditions and, in some cases, explicitly instructed them about their rights. The following excerpt describes one of *Patricia's* positive experiences:

[my experience in that job was] very pleasant, I'll be honest with you. Well, I met him [the employer] and it was so nice to meet him, and well, the situation ended because the other son no longer wanted to continue contributing to my pay. (...) He let me stay on for a month in the apartment with a salary and food so that I could look for a decent place.

These experiences encouraged informants to reflect on their past adaptive behaviours and to rethink the inevitability of the inequalities they had experienced. As found previously by Fernández-Ocón and López-Olvera (2009), the participants in our study reported that, after some time working in Spain, they became more discerning in relation to the job offers they accepted. They looked for better jobs, including those that allowed them to meet the requirements for legalizing their status (e.g., a formal contract). These requirements were mentioned in the narratives of women who worked for at least 3 years in an irregular situation before requesting a residence permit. Once obtained, their change in administrative status led to the hope that their employment situation would improve. However, these expectations were often unfulfilled.

It is not unusual for women who have all the necessary legal papers to continue experiencing oppressive labour relations in which they are still treated as illegal migrants (see also Agüero-Collins et al., 2018). However, the interviewees in our study reported a growing awareness of their rights as “documented” foreigners or Spanish citizens, a circumstance that was often accompanied by a search for jobs offering better conditions.

The women interviewed in our study also discovered their rights with the help of organizations that aid the migrant population, including the ADWS. Informants approached these organizations mainly in response to labour conflicts or problems associated with their migration status. After the initial contact, some became interested in activities that offered them the chance to learn more about their rights. This will be discussed in more detail in the next stage.

The experiences described at the pre-critical stage suggest that contact with new labour situations, the Spanish authorities, and local organizations was of particular importance in prompting FMDWs to develop a more elaborate understanding of injustice and to conceive of alternatives to adaptation. In other studies, SPD is presented as the outcome of explicit efforts or social interventions aimed at prompting such a development in pre-existing groups (e.g., Seider et al., 2020; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). In the present study, however, we observed another pathway: that of a disperse group of women who experience oppression daily and who progressively, and through daily transactions (Watts et al., 2003), discover that they are involved in asymmetrical power relations. This discovery leads them to settings where they meet people with similar experiences with whom they can develop critical consciousness and achieve liberation.

3.4 | Critical stage

Discovering rights opens the doorway to a new stage characterized by a more active search for information about rights. Local organizations, and especially the ADWS, provide opportunities in this sense, offering individual *legal advice*, educational opportunities, and *rights training*, as well as spaces in which to *share stories of oppression*. Through the *legal advice* and *rights training* provided by the ADWS, FMDWs are exposed to a rights-based approach that enables them to reframe their experiences within a political context. This approach helps them come to view labour abuses as rights violations that can be addressed through labour or immigration law, policy reform, and collective action. Interviewees recounted how they became convinced that the working conditions in their sector could be changed through “*the struggle*.” According to *Andrea*:

...our struggle is [related to] how vulnerable we are working as domestic workers, right? I mean, it's [a struggle] for our rights that are still not recognized, (...) [as well as against the] many very deplorable conditions to which those who do this work are exposed.

Individual *advice* and *rights training* emerged as factors that contributed to the development of some well-known cognitive components of SPD, including a root-cause aetiology (Collins, Kohfeldt, & Kornbluh, 2020) and a sense of agency (Aceros et al., 2021; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Although they are mentioned less in the extant literature on the topic, emotional responses to oppression—and their role in SPD—also appeared in the narratives. When FMDWs discover their rights, they come to understand that the situations they are exposed to are unfair, and this in turn generates feelings of sadness, anger, and *indignation*. This last feeling was mentioned by interviewees as a key experience pushing them towards the adoption of a more critical approach to their situations.

Organizations such as the ADWS provide opportunities for FMDWs to channel their outrage by offering spaces in which to *share their experiences of oppression* with other women. *Sharing stories* is an exercise actively promoted by the ADWS. It allows women to express their emotions and “let off steam,” thereby providing emotional relief. At the same time, it reinforces a critical stance towards injustice and helps justify actions designed to challenge it. In this sense, our

findings are consistent with those reported by previous studies highlighting the importance of migrants sharing their life stories as an empowerment process (Hung, 2012; Paloma, De-la-Morena, Sladkova, & López-Torres, 2020).

Sharing stories is also a means of fostering another psychological process reflected in the SPD literature: that of collective identity formation. FMDWs tend to identify with each other, since they all share the condition of being women, being foreigners and being from the same continent. All these identities are salient in the ADWS in its work to support feminism and pro-migrant advocacy movements, as well as in the activities it organizes to promote Latin American culture. However, being a member of the domestic workers' group is even more relevant to the purposes of the organization. By listening to each other, women come to understand that their experiences are not exclusive to them, but are rather something shared by many others working in their sector. This seems to be associated with the development of a sense of belonging to the "migrant domestic worker class" (Rother, 2017). Excerpts such as the one below exemplifies how sharing stories of oppression is accompanied by collective identification:

... the process of entering [the association] is always very positive because, at that moment, I also needed a companion, right? Someone who knew (...) what we were all talking about, right? And so it was like we were speaking the same language, see? It was the same language of abuse.

It is worth mentioning that although, in Spain, domestic work occupies one of the lowest positions on the occupational hierarchy (Iglesias, Botella, Rúa, Mielgo, & Caro, 2015), at this critical stage, FMDWs reject the internalized oppression associated with such a situation. Rather, interviewees reported a positive labour identity resulting from their involvement in the ADWS. This is clearly illustrated in the following excerpt from the interview with *Carmen*:

We are like any other worker. (...) we must work because our job is very important, it's about taking care of people. (...) We take care of lives and we take care of them [local people] so that they can go to work. We take care of their children so that they can reconcile their work life [with their family life].

Collective identity development has become a key focus of attention in recent studies on SPD (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Hope & Bañales, 2019; Lozada et al., 2017). Our data suggest that, when women identify themselves as a group involved "in a struggle," they are more inclined to support sociopolitical actions in favour of their collective interests. This motivation to fight against labour inequality is an important component of SPD (Diemer, Hsieh, & Pan, 2009) and a relevant step towards liberator actions.

3.5 | Liberation stage

Interviewees identified *engagement in sociopolitical actions* designed to promote their rights as part of their current role as activists in the ADWS. Activism can be considered an indicator that a person or group has engaged in liberation processes (Watts et al., 2003). In this study, such liberator behaviour takes a number of different forms. Depending on the intensity with which FMDWs actively engage with "the struggle," they behave as informants, recruiters, volunteers, or leaders.

As *informants*, FMDWs are multipliers of the information to which they have access through the ADWS. In multiple contexts, participants share what they know about labor rights with other FMDWs, sometimes serving as their advisors. As *recruiters*, FMDWs encourage other women to join the association, thereby helping to strengthen its social base. The third role is that of *volunteers*. In this case, FMDWs dedicate some of their leisure time to supporting the association's activities. For example, they help develop the materials to be used, make the snacks to be shared and the banners for the protest marches, and, occasionally, participate in collective actions.

The aforementioned roles were predominant in the narratives of those interviewees who did not occupy formal leadership positions in the ADWS. In such cases, due to different work schedules and family responsibilities, participants felt unable to commit themselves any more intensely to the association. However, they contributed to “the struggle” as much as their situations allowed. Eventually, some FMDWs transcend the roles described above and take over *leadership positions*, assuming responsibility for the ongoing planning, management, and implementation of collective actions. Their commitment to “the struggle” also includes acting as representatives of the association in the public arena. Activism allows FMDWs to transform their indignation and critical reflection into action and also reinforces their sense of belonging and agency (Aceros et al., 2021).

Sociopolitical actions motivated the interviewees in our study to persevere in their commitment to “the struggle,” which involves constantly moving between the critical stage and the liberation stage, in an interactive process. Participants understand that this process is an ongoing one with no end in sight, because most of their objectives are far from being achieved, and new aims are constantly arising. Thus, when asked what would make her persevere in her struggle to defend domestic workers' rights, *Tatiana* replied:

I don't think that when we finally manage to get Convention 189 ratified we will have achieved glory. I don't think so. It's going to take time for it to come into force and everything else, and there will always be women who arrive [in Spain] (...) lacking information, lacking rights, [they are] women who need to be empowered, women who need to be heard. And I think I can be useful for that [purpose].

Activism has been theorized as a means of articulating the cognitive and behavioural components of SPD (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). In the case of FMDWs, the mere fact of engaging in sociopolitical action is remarkable when we consider the multiple limitations they face in terms of their political organization. As Boris and Nadasen (2008) state, domestic workers do not exactly represent the prototype of the labour activist, and Lai (2010) views their liberator behaviour as “activism against the odds” (p. 503). However, our data shed light on these women's capacity to challenge oppressive labour relations.

4 | CONCLUSIONS

The present study examines the narratives of a group of FMDWs, focusing on how they follow a process of transformation that starts with initial experiences of injustice and ends in their becoming agents of change. The theoretical framework of SPD was used as a guideline for organizing their experiences sequentially, driving the emergence of a critical stance on labour conditions, as well as collective efforts geared towards their transformation. Given the difficulties faced by FMDWs, which limit their capacity for political organization, it is important to understand what factors make their sociopolitical action possible in their host societies.

We have described a process in which FMDWs enter the domestic work sector and suffer exploitation and abuse, but also discover their rights and receive rights training. Furthermore, sharing stories of oppression and engaging in sociopolitical actions are fundamental to triggering sociopolitical development. Direct experiences of oppression are important inputs in this process, especially when shared with peers. Consistently with that observed in previous studies, these findings support the idea of storytelling and peer dialogue as factors that foster the SPD of disenfranchised groups (Hung, 2012; Paloma et al., 2020; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). These practices are not only beneficial to the formation of critical consciousness, they also help build collective identity and mobilizing emotions.

Previous studies and interventions have focused mainly on critical consciousness, at the expense of other components of the construct, particularly sociopolitical action (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Our analysis points towards collective identity as an outcome of storytelling, resonating with studies in which life stories are deemed to trigger the formation of this construct (Carr, 2003). Our findings also highlight the importance in SPD of the

emotions derived from both collective identification and rights discovery and training. Although emotions do not play a central role in the SPD framework, further research and practice are required to understand how they contribute to critical reflection and action.

The results of this study help to deepen the active and practical nature of the SPD. Many studies have highlighted the development of critical consciousness in this field (Kennedy et al., 2020; Magee & Pherali, 2019; Nguyen & Quinn, 2018), but although critical consciousness is a fundamental pillar of the framework, in itself it does not imply a tangible commitment to action, which is the purpose of SPD (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). We highlight that sociopolitical action may take many forms, including roles such as informant, recruiter, volunteer, and leader. These roles involve different levels of commitment and practitioners should foster different ones in accordance with the psychological and material possibilities of the oppressed individuals and groups with whom they work.

While a high level of involvement in activism is considered to be more in line with the liberation of disenfranchised groups (Watts & Flanagan, 2007), the costs and benefits of such a demanding type of sociopolitical behaviour should be seriously considered (Aceros et al., 2021). Volunteering has been identified as a positive form of community engagement, being similar to activism in its capacity to enhance marginalized people's well-being (Gilster, 2012). However, existing data suggest that what is important is not replacing one form of engagement with another, but rather providing a role structure with various forms of participation (Maton, 2008). The opportunity provided by this structure allows people, in different ways and at their own pace, to develop critical consciousness and transform it into action (Watts et al., 2003).

Finally, the present study points to the importance of a rights-based approach in the way FMDWs make sense of injustice and how they are guided towards transformative action. According to Watts et al. (2011), a rights-based perspective frames social injustice as something rooted in the deprivation of human or constitutional rights. Our findings suggest that intervention processes designed to promote SPD in this population should adopt a rights-based approach and include strategies for disseminating information about their rights.

Although we have presented the results as a journey from an acritical to a liberation stage, our study also suggests that different FMDWs may initiate a pathway against injustice from a different point of departure (see also, Watts et al., 2003). Additionally, some of them do not arrive to a liberation stage and leave the association as soon as their personal case is addressed and resolved. As we have reported elsewhere, some FMDWs quit after a period of active involvement in sociopolitical action (Aceros et al., 2021). Thus, SPD in this population is not as linear as the theoretical framework appears to indicate (Watts et al., 1999). However, we consider the SPD framework is useful to understand the generalities of the pathway followed by most of the participants.

This study has several limitations. First, it was carried out with the involvement of an association whose formal existence is relatively recent in comparison with more historical organizations in Spain, which have about 40 years of existence (Fulladosa, 2015). Further studies could involve organizations with a longer history. In this way, the experience of migrant women with a more long-standing commitment to activism could be explored. Second, because of the retrospective nature of the life history method, people interpret their experiences sometime after they occurred and probably from a position they have acquired since then. We therefore suggest that future studies employ longitudinal qualitative models to carefully analyse each experience. Furthermore, the participants in our sample were purposively selected. Although the use of a purposive sample is common in qualitative studies, it does not provide information on the perceptions of non-interviewees, that is, non-ADWS activist FMDWs. Future research should address this shortcoming. For example, interviewing FMDWs with no (or truncated) activist experience could offer a better understanding of the conditions limiting the pathway towards liberation in this population. Of particular interest in this regard is the situation of irregular migrant women, who are misrepresented in our sample.

Despite these limitations, our study provides a set of analytical categories and adopts a developmental approach, allowing researchers to follow the life stories of FMDWs, from their entry into the domestic work sector to their commitment to activism. Insights from the present study may shed light on processes of self-organization and may guide social interventions aimed at promoting SPD among FMDWs and similar oppressed groups.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study has complied with APA ethical principles in their treatment of participants. It was approved by the Universidad Industrial de Santander (Colombia). It was also discussed with members of the CESPYP, as well as with the direction board of the Association of Domestic Workers of Seville (Spain). This latter organization authorized the study and collaborated with researchers in the processes of participants' selection and outcomes reviewing.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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