Research Articles

How Women Migrants Cope With Their Labour Experience: The Case of Eastern European Women Working on Strawberry Farms in Spain

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to know how migrant women from eastern Europe (hereinafter EE) define their migratory experience and how they face it. They were interviewed 25 women who work in the strawberry fields of Huelva (southwest of Spain). The phenomenon is approached from Liberation Psychology (LP) and qualitative methodology. LP emphasises power, as one of the core components of the migration experience, this concept has guided the interpretation of the findings. In-depth interviews with individuals and groups, comprising migrant women from Romania and Bulgaria, were conducted. A thematic analysis was performed which allowed us to identify the key themes running through their narratives. These have been grouped into three areas: the mechanisms of oppression, sources of power, and coping with oppression. In a bid to enhance the well-being of female migrant workers and levels of social justice several are proposed to giving workers better, more comprehensive information about the migration process; facilitating a redefinition of the concept of migration; and providing cultural competence training for employers as part of social policy are discussed.

Keywords: women, strawberry farms, migration experience, power, qualitative methodology

Migrant women, mostly from eastern Europe (hereinafter EE), working on strawberry farms in Huelva province (a region located in southwest Spain), make up one of the largest migrant groups serving the local agricultural industry, with worker numbers rising from 600 in 2000 to 21,000 in 2004 (Gualda-Caballero, 2004), and to 33,250 in February 2017 (OPAM, 2017). These women decide to emigrate driven by their precarious employment situation and the need to provide for their families, ultimately becoming the breadwinners of their households (Oso, 2008). In 2012 the unemployment rate in Romania was 7%, reaching 7.3% in 2013. Meanwhile, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2012 amounted to €131,558 million, increasing to €142,245 million in 2013 (Oficina de Información Diplomática del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación, 2018b). In Bulgaria, the 2012 unemployment rate was 10.7%, reaching 11.8% in 2013. Meanwhile, 2012 GDP per capita amounted to €5.465 million, and €5.497 million in 2013, with inflation reaching 0.9 per cent (Oficina de Información Diplomática del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación, 2018a).

Although the destinations chosen by these migrants offer better salaries than they can hope for back home, their incorporation into the agricultural labour market typically occurs under disadvantaged conditions. The complex interplay of their status as migrants, women, with limited financial resources and, in some cases, little knowledge of the Spanish language—intersectionality—places them in a particularly oppressive situation (Weber, 2010). What is more, the preference for hiring middle-aged women with children reflects the discriminatory nature of Huelva's strawberry industry, by combining work practices that demand round-the-clock availability, job uncertainty and feminisation in the workplace. Employing female workers offers a number of advantages to employers when it comes to working conditions (e.g., greater contract length, scheduling and wage flexibility) and workforce organisation (e.g., mastering and performing different kinds of tasks, adapting to the pace and volume of work) (Deere, 2005; Lara, 1995). Furthermore, in the case of strawberry cultivation, certain qualities are especially valued, such as impressive delicacy and skill, which are traditionally attributed to women through cultural constructs (Reigada-Olaizola, 2011).

Against this backdrop, little attention has been paid to how these women define their working and living conditions, not least how they face up to them. In this paper we focus on EE migrant women's perceptions of their migration experience at strawberry farms in Huelva province. To achieve this we employ a theoretical framework from the perspective of Liberation Psychology (LP).

EE Migrant Women on the Strawberry Farms of Huelva Province: From a Liberation Psychology Perspective

Migrant women working on strawberry farms in Huelva often do so under precarious conditions, due to the complex interplay of their status as migrants, women, with limited financial resources and, in some cases, little knowledge of the Spanish language. The LP perspective is sensitive to human diversity and, under a patriarchal and capitalist system, provides an explanation of how belonging to these social categories often leads to situations of oppression on different ecological levels (Angelique & Culley, 2000; Martín-Baró, 1986; Moane, 2003). For example, on a political level (e.g., hiring policies in the country of origin which combine round-the-clock availability, job uncertainty and workplace feminisation in export agriculture); at a community level (e.g., precarious working conditions, physical isolation and segregation, limited access to community resources); on a relational level (e.g., limited contact with the host population, ethnic prejudice); and at a personal level (e.g., lack of personal control and power) (Deere, 2005; Reigada-Olaizola, 2011; Rodríguez & Breva, 2012; SOC, 2005). In this context, the LP perspective helps us understand that the work of migrant women occurs within a set of asymmetrical power relations between them and their employers—as men, bosses, native to the country, with a higher disposable income and language proficiency—and with the host population in general, hampering their chances of achieving well-being (Moane, 2003; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2002). Therefore, failing to examine the roles played by power and oppression and the potential for liberation generates both theory and practice that contribute towards maintaining the status quo, characterised by asymmetrical power relations and a lack of social justice.

LP relates the conditions of oppression in host contexts and the strategies that migrant women deploy to address them. This perspective considers it essential to identify those strategies that enable the liberation of oppressive structures (García-Ramírez, de la Mata, Paloma, & Hernández-Plaza, 2011; Martín-Baró, 1986). It is well acknowledged that women are active agents who, in an organised and collective manner, can influence their environment. It is therefore necessary to understand women's perspectives in order to share in their expe-

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riences and fully appreciate not only how oppressive contexts influence them, but also how they choose to respond.

Finally, LP stresses the importance of explaining social phenomena based on the historical context in which they occur in order to understand their complexity and avoid the ahistoricism of mainstream psychology (Martín-Baró, 1986). To historically contextualise this study, it is important to point out that it was undertaken in 2012, four years after the financial crisis first hit Spain. As a result, a decline was seen in hiring within the country of origin, which had characterised Huelva's strawberry industry employment market between 2001 and 2007. This decline was accompanied by an increase in hiring Spanish workers as a strategy to alleviate national unemployment. Therefore, male and female Spanish labourers found themselves working on Huelva's strawberry farms alongside migrants from different countries, including Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa (Reigada-Olaizola, 2012). Understandably, this led to, among other things, a competitive environment in which immigrants and natives competed for the little available work.

In short, some of LP's main contributions in addressing the limitations of mainstream research are: (a) appreciating that being female and a migrant can lead to situations of oppression; (b) recognising that migrant women relate to the host population from a subordinate position; (c) highlighting the need to listen to the experiences of those groups involved in the migration process; and (d) recognising that migrant women have the capabilities to resist and object to said oppression (García-Ramírez et al., 2011). Our particular focus is on migrant women from Romania and Bulgaria and how they view their migration experience. In this study, developed within a context characterised by asymmetries of power and a high risk of social exclusion and fragmentation, it was seen as essential to include the personal perspectives of these female migrants in order to discover how they experience conditions of oppression and the strategies they employ to address them.

Narrative Analysis as a Tool for Acknowledging Migrant Women

In recent years, more attention has been paid to the role played by power dynamics as a key psychosocial process in negotiating settlement processes and migration experiences in cultural contexts characterised by asymmetrical power relations. Growing importance is also being given to taking on board the perspectives and experiences of migrant women (Albar et al., 2010; Pantea, 2012).

Qualitative research, encompassing a comprehension-based, naturalistic and interpretive paradigm—and, more specifically, the social constructionist, critical approach—allows for reflexivity, the adoption of collaborative approaches, and the use of research as a tool for emancipation to be incorporated. This type of research enables knowledge generation based on the world view and experience of oppressed groups (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; Mulvey et al., 2000). Meanwhile, narrative analysis allows us to (a) recognise that personal life stories are negotiated in the context of narratives told by the communities where women live; (b) understand the influence that culture and context have on women's personal lives; and (c) learn about their migration experience (Rappaport, 2000).

This study aimed to find out how EE migrant women working on strawberry farms in Huelva province describe their migration experience. To do this, we posed three research questions: (a) how do EE women working on strawberry farms in Huelva experience and define, in terms of oppressive conditions, their migration experience? (b) which sources of power are identified by EE migrant women working on strawberry farms in Huelva?; and (c) how do EE migrant women working on strawberry farms in Huelva cope with oppression?

Method

Participants

Twenty-one women from Romania and four women from Bulgaria working on strawberry farms in Huelva (southwest Spain) were interviewed. They were selected using purposive and snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). First, to ensure a diversity of profiles and migration experiences, the women were selected according to the farms where they work, country of origin, and previous work experience in the Huelva strawberry industry. We chose these factors because of the relative influence they have on different living and working conditions, and how they link with different levels of power asymmetry and opportunities for achieving well-being. We were unable to gain access to all the labourers we wanted—only those working on farms the owners gave us permission to enter. Table 1 outlines the profile of the female interviewees and the aforementioned factors.

Table 1

Profile of Semi-Structured Interview Participant

Name, Nationality, Age	Marital status and children / Work experience	Years going to Spain (spoken Spanish / desire to return to country of origin)	Other information of interest
Adriana, RO[a], 24,	Married, one daughter / Previous experience on the same farm and in other areas of Spain	6 (Yes / Yes)	Arrived in Huelva after seeing information on social networks. Contract awarded in country of origin
Ionana, RO[a], 35	Married, two children / Previous experience on the same farm and in other areas of Spain	8 (Yes / Yes)	Travelled with friends. Arrived in Huelva after seeing information on social networks. Contract awarded in country of origin
Marcela, RO, 33	Married, one son / Always worked on the same farm	7 (Yes / Yes)	Arrived in Huelva after seeing information on social networks. Has secondary school certificate. Contract awarded in country of origin
Laura, RO, 37	Separated, two daughters / Always worked on the same farm	7 (n.f. / Yes)	First time, arrived with her brother. She wants to bring her daughters to Spain with her
Nela, RO, 35	Married, two daughters / Previous experience on the same farm and in other areas of Spain	8 (n.f. / Yes)	Arrived with her sister. Hired in country of origin. She is a grandmother. She first came with contract awarded in country of origin and via a recruitment process, then through an informal contact
Rodica, RO, 31	Divorced, two daughters / Worked on several farms	9 (Yes / Regularly returns to her country)	First came to Spain with contract awarded in country of origin
Magda, RO, 45	Two children. Has a partner in Spain / Worked on several farms	9 (Yes / Yes)	Contract awarded in country of origin. Arrived in Spain through social networks
Natalia, RO, ?	Married, two children / Has had various jobs	6 (Yes / Yes)	Hired in country of origin

Name, Nationality, Age	Marital status and children / Work experience	Years going to Spain (spoken Spanish / desire to return to country of origin)	Other information of interest
Veronica, RO, 41	? / Always worked on the same farm	7 (Yes / Yes)	She first came with contract awarded in country of origin and via a recruitment process, then through an informal contact
Sabina, RO, 39	Married, her husband is working in Spain. One son and two daughters / Always worked on the same farm	7 (Yes / Yes)	She first came with contract awarded in country of origin and via a recruitment process, then through an informal contact
Sandra, RO, 37	Married, one son / Always worked on the same farm	7 (Yes / Yes)	She first came with contract awarded in country of origin and via a recruitment process, then through an informal contact
Sofia, RO, 40	One daughter and one son / Always worked on the same farm	7 (No / Yes)	She first came with contract awarded in country of origin and via a recruitment process, then through an informal contact
Viorica, RO, ?	One son / Always worked on the same farm	7 (No / Yes)	She first came with contract awarded in country of origin and via a recruitment process, then through an informal contact
Ilinca, RO, 38	Two daughters. Has a partner in Spain / Has worked on several farms	8 (Yes / ?)	Contract awarded in country of origin
Elena, RO, 42	Married, three children / Has had various jobs	10 (Yes / Yes)	Baccalaureate. Contract awarded in country of origin. Arrived via a Polish company
Flavia, RO, 42	Married, three children / Has had various jobs and worked on several farms	9 (Yes / Yes)	Baccalaureate. Contract awarded in country of origin
Catina, RO, 46	Married, two children / Has worked on several farms	6 (Yes / Yes)	Contract awarded in country of origin
Anca, RO, 36	Two children, one of them is in Spain with her / Has worked on several farms and in other jobs	7 (Yes / ?)	Contract awarded in country of origin and via a recruitment process
Daria, RO, 44	Married, two daughters / Has worked on several farms	4 (No / ?)	Arrived after seeing information on social support networks
Daniela, RO, 37	? / Has had various jobs and worked on several farms	? (Yes / Yes)	Lives with her brother in Spain
Alina, RO, <25	Single / Always worked on the same farm	4 (Yes / No, she needs money)	Arrived after seeing information on social support networks
Claudia, BG, 37	Two children / In Spain she has worked on one farm	fS (No / Yes, but only because of the children)	Has studied. Came to Spain with two neighbours. Contract awarded in country of origin through an agency

Name, Nationality, Age	Marital status and children / Work experience	Years going to Spain (spoken Spanish / desire to return to country of origin)	Other information of interest
Stela, BG, 38	Married, two children / In Spain she has worked on one farm	fS (No / Yes, but when she earns money)	No contract awarded in country of origin or through an agency
Rahela, BG, 45	One daughter / In Spain she has worked on one farm	fS (No / Yes)	Arrived through an agency with no contract in country of origin
Liana, BG, 40	Single; her mother and brother are in Spain / She is a jeweller. She has had various jobs in the hospitality industry	6 (Yes / Intends to stay in Spain.)	Family in Spain. Did not come to Spain to work on the farms

Note. RO = Romania; BG = Bulgaria; n.f. = not fluent; ? = unknown; fS = first time in Spain.
[a]From Bucharest (all other: from a village).

In order to establish contact with these women, we collaborated with 'Mujeres en Zona de Conflicto', a development NGO that provides medical, legal and social counselling to immigrant women residing in the area. All participation was voluntary and the women's real names were omitted. This study met the criteria of confidentiality and informed consent as required by the American Psychological Association.

Strawberry Farms

Interviews were held with migrant women from seven farms in Huelva province that gave us access: three in the east of the region, two in the west, and two farms midway between both areas. All were countryside locations far from urban centres and, in most cases, were the workers' place of residence. Trade union and labour inspection bodies are tasked with visiting these sites to assess the living conditions. Some go back forty years while others are more recent. Once a week, the employer must provide transportation into town so that workers can do their shopping. Contact with the farm owners was made through an agricultural association.

The number of farm managers ranged from one to four. In all cases, the managers were relatives of the owner or they were the owners themselves. The number of workers ranged from 30 to 150, depending on the month and size of the farm. All farms employed a mid-level supervisor, either Spanish or Romanian.

Instrument

The semi-structured interviews followed a topic guide prepared by the research group, flexible enough to allow new issues to be dealt with as and when they arose (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). It covered five thematic areas based on the phenomena to be explored: the journey to Spain, working conditions, interpersonal relationships, living conditions, and communication with the outside world other than on the farm. The thematic areas were chosen taking into account factors identified by other research as influencing migration experiences.

Interviewers and Analysts

Three Spanish women collected the information: one working for the DNGO 'Mujeres en Zona de Conflicto' and two university lecturers. They were middle-class women, aged between 30 and 40 years, and residents of Huelva city. They were introduced to the respondents as such. Information analysis was performed by three teachers with the same characteristics. Their position of power over the female interviewees—as autochtho-

nous, university-educated women from middle-class backgrounds—may have had an influence on the answers given and on the interpretation of the information provided. The interviewers facilitated the process by maintaining a discreet position on the direction of the interview, creating a comfortable climate of trust. For example, sharing something to eat, holding group interviews whenever the interviewees requested so, and conducting interviews in a neutral setting.

At first glance, the narratives seemed to paint women as passive victims of the oppression. However, joint reflection, a situational analysis of the information, and a visit to the migrant women's countries of origin allowed us to identify the respondents' strengths and weaknesses. In addition, we were able to observe the coping strategies used to deal with job insecurity back home, the risks they took—and continue to take—to better their lives, and their awareness of the discrimination they face as migrant women.

Procedure

Sixteen in-depth interviews were held with migrant women. This approach was taken due to its versatility, its usefulness when studying sensitive topics and its flexibility; it also fosters rapport building, as it allows unforeseen aspects to be revealed and facilitates a contextual understanding of women's life experiences (Bernard, 2000). The interviews were held at locations previously negotiated with the participants and which protected their privacy and confidentiality. At the respondents' request, in six interviews, between two and four women took part, which made them feel that they were not in it alone. The move to a group setting intended to reduce the hierarchical relationships between researchers and respondents and create a climate that invites open expression of the women's emotional lives (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). When needed, language assistance was made available, provided by some of the respondents' colleagues who could speak fluent Spanish and Bulgarian.

The interviews were audio recorded and lasted approximately an hour and a half. They were later transcribed, which constituted the material for analysis. ATLAS.ti 5.2 software was used to organise and manage the information.

Thematic analysis was applied to the information using a systematic procedure. It has been started with an initial reading and understanding of the narratives, followed by line-by-line reading and text fragmentation. Authors asked themselves awareness questions to conceptualise each segment of the text and generate descriptive categories. The second step involved regrouping and looking for interrelations among descriptive categories, generating other conceptual categories. To do this, we built a hierarchy of broad and specific issues in an effort to identify interconnections between them. Lastly, theoretical integration was performed, where new concepts were added to existing concepts in the literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

To ensure trustworthiness of the analysis process, an independent female reviewer trained in qualitative research methods evaluated the thematic summaries and coding structures, and documented what were revealed to be the main themes. In addition, she tested the final coding profile to ensure that any bias was explained. Confidence intervals were examined through consistent themes and coding structures. Consistency was determined by comparing the interpretations of the analysts and the reviewer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results and Discussion

The posed research questions were answered and the findings discussed based on the literature. Specifically, four mechanisms of oppression emerged from the narratives: exclusion, exploitation, manipulation and gender domination. Four sources of power were identified: employers, supervisors, agents and other female workers. Finally, the respondent`s means of coping with conditions of oppression on a cognitive level—resigning themselves to it or redefining it—and on a behavioural level emerged by means of conservative or transformational responses, with the latter responses taking place on an interpersonal level.

How Do EE Women Working on Strawberry Farms in Huelva Experience and Define, in Terms of Oppressive Conditions, Their Migration Experience?

Oppression refers to socio-political conditions that help individuals or groups maintain privileges over others, taking away their opportunities and resources for enjoying well-being (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Oppression is facilitated by the infra-humanisation that the dominant group exercises over the oppressed group, considering it unable to possess a valid culture and good moral conduct for success in life (Paladino et al., 2002). Four conditions of oppression emerged from the narratives:

Exclusion. Some narrative accounts reveal actions taken by the oppressor group to exclude these migrant women and undermine their opportunities to enjoy their rights as citizens. By fragmenting the collective and restricting their access to resources, the dominant group shows their rejection of and contempt for migrant women and their work. This legitimises their devaluation and infra-humanisation (Moane, 2003; Prilleltensky, 2001).

Fragmentation among groups of women depending on their country of origin was observed in the negative stereotypes that some hold about others. As Sofia comments: 'The Bulgarians do not clean... they seem very conservative, closed; when I wear a dress they look at me strangely'.

Superiors sometimes foster fragmented relationships, pitting women against each other. They promote some of them to positions of power and grant them privileges—as supervisors—making them 'tokens', while placing others in subordinate positions (Moreland, 1965).

> "The supervisor is a Romanian woman who mistreats people, doesn't speak well and if someone doesn't do their work well, she sends them home... with threats like... you'll never work here again" [Sabina].

Social fragmentation is facilitated by "ghettoisation"; in other words, restricting housing to the countryside, away from urban centres (Marcuse, 2001). A general lack of interaction between the local population and the respondents was observed ('I have no relationship with the villagers', Natalia), which makes them feel isolated and longing for social relations. They showed a desire for self-actualisation, plus feelings of being deprived of opportunities for enjoyment, and even access to information.

> "The worst thing is that you're trapped on the farm ... I don't know what happens outside, the people you see every day are the same and that is killing me... I want to see what's happening in the world, I don't even have Internet" [Rodica]

This physical distance hinders communication among groups and, as voiced by the respondents, restricts their access to resources and services (e.g., healthcare, social services) and fosters the exclusion of the collective.

As Sofia puts it: 'I don't have a doctor here. Sometimes I think about what would happen if someone needed a doctor for something more serious...'

Exploitation reveals itself through job insecurity, given the exhausting working conditions that *violate the collective agreement*, condemning them to *underemployment* (Jensen & Slack, 2003); a *lack of occupational hazard prevention measures*, as a result of *denying them necessary work tools* that they have to buy themselves (e.g., rubber boots); and a *lack of adequate on-the-job training* (e.g., courses covering occupational risk prevention). These working conditions trigger a deterioration in health, hinder socioeconomic development and leave them little time for leisure activities.

> "You have a half-hour break when you get one, half an hour that is actually twenty minutes... you have time to eat and go to the toilet, but not to rest" [Nela]

Nela feels subjected to an *abuse of power* that her superiors exert through humiliation, verbal abuse and threats: 'slaves, you feel like a slave'. This exploitation proves an obstacle for migrant women when it comes to accessing jobs and community structures that protect their employment rights, and which also forces them to perform precarious work under the threat of being reported and fired.

> "I'm really scared, I can't say anything (referring to the fact that they cannot tell the interviewer anything about the treatment they receive)... if I say anything bad, I won't be working here again' [Viorica]

Manipulation refers not only to a *lack and shortage of information*, but also to the *manipulated information* provided. This is seen in the distorted information that employers and the media convey in order to naturalise oppression and make it fit their interests. Montero (2004) talks of how informational power is channelled through the media via politics and the economy, thus naturalising and justifying power asymmetries.

Misinformation as a form of manipulation emerges when respondents narrate their experiences of the migration process, their working and living conditions, their rights as workers and their healthcare rights.

> "...they told me the day of the journey and that I only have to have money for the bus... we were told €150 for the journey. Then I had to pay €150 commission. But when we got to the bus, we were told that tickets had already been paid by the company. And in the end, we paid €100 commission and nothing else. I have no idea when they're going to give us any money" [Sofia]

Nela perceives a stereotypical, stigmatised view that the locals hold of them, namely that they think their home countries are underdeveloped: 'The townspeople think we come from somewhere with no electricity, with nothing...'

Gender domination emerges as a form of control over women because of their gender, which is exercised by employers, supervisors, fellow workers, and society as a whole. This type of domination is culturally ingrained and reveals itself in the women's narratives in various ways.

On the one hand, gender domination is seen in the *collective imaginary*, which perpetuates the existing idea that, in the past, some employees had been *sexually abused* by their employers. This serves as a strategy to maintain employee subordination. Veronica explains how she has experienced sexual blackmail from her boss:

> "I went off with a boss to do some overtime in the afternoon, 'Do you want to stay with me to load the truck? You're looking fitter' and I said 'Ok, I'll stay, I don't really mind'. And when everyone left he said,

'Let's go to the house'... I was new back then, I was scared, I didn't say anything, I didn't know what was going on. Until he explained with hand movements, and I said, 'What...?' And then he said 'Look, I'll give you €50'"

This is also observed when the respondents describe situations where their superiors objectify women when selecting them to work, valuing them in terms of beauty or eyeing them up obscenely. As Nela puts it: 'the bosses are disgusting; they have smutty looks that make you feel sick'.

"The first night they were looking us up and down... to see if we were pretty. I was hoping that they'd explain how the job is done, how it's paid, but nothing of the sort. They were just looking to see how pretty we were..." [Sofia]

However, while some women—much like Sofia—perceive these forms of behaviour as aggression and gender discrimination, others—like Liana—naturalise it (Montero, 2004) and do not express discomfort on the subject, which is known as internalised oppression: 'We are women, they are men, they can't look at us in the same way as they look at the men on the farm'. *Internalised oppression* occurs when migrant women internalise these messages, as well as their subordination or inferiority, because they are migrant women (Martín-Baró, 1986). As such, they hold back from carrying out actions that help overcome oppressive relationships, thus perpetuating their lack of opportunities (we will come back to this idea later).

In some interviews, the women express *limited freedom to have relationships* with the opposite sex in their spare time or to take part in recreational activities. For example, in the words of Viorica: 'when your boyfriend comes round, you can't sit with him on the doorstep and chat, and things like that'. Thus, employers and supervisors attempt to exert dominance over the respondents by restricting them on an emotional and behavioural level. These actions involve gender-based control mechanisms which, according to Moane (2003), manifest themselves through controlling the interpersonal relationships maintained with the opposite sex.

" At the front door there are cameras, everything can be seen, and if the supervisor says, 'that girl wasn't at home at twelve o'clock and the others went to a club', the next day they really take it out on you" [Nela]

Sexist stereotypes among the host population also emerge from the narratives, with accusations of the women 'stealing' their husbands. These stereotypes are rooted in hostile sexism (Expósito, Moya, & Glick, 1998), which thrives on unequal power.

"We've heard local women say that the women are taking their husbands off them. When I got here and I saw some kids, I thought of my own child and I said to him 'how's it going?', and they said to me 'you Romanian whore'" [Sabina]

The aforementioned stereotypes also play out among co-workers of different nationalities (e.g., Bulgarians vs. Romanians vs. Roma Gypsies). This serves to distance themselves from the stigmatised and discriminated group, brushing off its traits and placing themselves in a better position. For example, we observe how some Bulgarians think that Romanian women make themselves available to Spanish men and that they are 'an easy lay', almost to the point of infra-humanising them (Leyens et al., 2000). Romanian women are also accused of using their sexuality to get a man to support them and their families.

"The Romanians come here wanting to bag themselves a Spanish man, perhaps they marry him and life here is all sorted out... many married Romanian women who come here get themselves a Spanish boyfriend and take his money off him to send it to their husbands in Romania" [Liana]

Gender domination also appears through a *discrepancy between perceptions of group versus personal discrimination* (Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990). Some respondents perceive more discrimination as a group than individually, considering that their personal experiences are not representative of what usually happens to the group. This strategy is referred to as 'leave the group' (Lalonde & Silverman, 1994) and is expressed by Sofia: 'They look at women a lot, but I don't care... They treat me well. I've never had problems with them'.

This phenomenon serves to protect them from negative emotional consequences, by maintaining self-esteem and a sense of control over their lives (Crosby, 1984; Taylor & Dubé, 1986).

Which Sources of Power Are Identified by EE Migrant Women Working on Strawberry Farms in Huelva?

The narratives reveal how oppression mechanisms are exerted by different sources of power: employers, supervisors, agents and other female workers.

The power of **employers** derives from their reward, coercive, and informational power (French & Raven, 1959). This group recruits, pays wages and terminates contracts. Their position enables them to force their employees to work even though their employment rights are not being respected. As Nela says, 'the manager... as she could not work overtime, in the end he fired her'. This is, however, contingent upon the employer's will. Some employers also exercise their power by making it difficult for the women to have a relationship or to go out in their free time. Mention was made of a boss entering the living quarters of some women to reprimand them verbally.

"My daughter had problems with the owner. One day, he started yelling at her, saying that she was stupid and she was an airhead. Then he came to the house at night and said the same things to her in front of us" [Marta]

The **supervisors** — *male and female* — organise and evaluate the women's work, and have the power to record the number of hours worked or boxes completed, which affects their wages. This power derives from their reward, coercive, and informational power bases. Sometimes they wield referent power to the extent that some of the workers identify with them and want their position (French & Raven, 1959).

Shouting: "'Quick, with two hands, why are you sitting down, why are you drinking water?' (referring to the Romanian supervisor). I don't like how they talk to the people who have said animal or pig to them" [Sabina]

Sometimes the respondents convey how female supervisors instigate conflicts between women of different nationalities, and how they discriminate against those who come from another country.

"And shouting (referring to the supervisor) that Bulgarian women are like porcelain, and they think they're really clever, and that Romanian women will run and leave the Bulgarians alone in the greenhouse" [Rodica]

Supervisors' 'altercentrism' is observed when they criticise members of their own group, while assigning positive characteristics to the dominant group. This 'leave the group' strategy is an attempt to do away with negative stereotypes (Lalonde & Silverman, 1994).

The **agents** from the cooperatives are the link between employers and female employees, and are those best placed to provide the latter with information concerning their working conditions. They exert reward and informational power. They are responsible for managing bureaucratic affairs, hiring in the country of origin, and providing information about employment, the journey and workers' rights. Ultimately, they are the people who the women turn to in the event of any difficulties.

> "They didn't even know where they were going and that the company charges commission and that everything is usually brought here. They have an agreement with the agent" [Nela]

Other female workers possess informational, referent and expert power. This is observed in the establishment of mutual support networks as well as exchanges of information to which they would not be able to formally access.

> "There are three Turkish women who last night came to look for me and they were crying, they wanted me to help them talk to the boss... And the boss asked me why I was helping them, why I was making my life complicated, why I always translated" [Rodica]

At times relationships between female co-workers are mediated by stereotypes and prejudices depending on the country of origin, or a sexist view of their condition as women, which make interaction difficult.

> "It's a bit racist ... one day you get the first box out and the Spanish woman is behind you, and she asks why you're taking so much, that you've come here to take people's jobs" [Natalia]

Once again we see the 'altercentrism' and 'leave the group' phenomena being used to do away with negative stereotypes (Lalonde & Silverman, 1994).

Despite the power of domination exercised by employers, supervisors, agents and other female workers, there are occasions in which aid relationships are established. Cases include illness, family problems and peer relations.

> "The boss is like a father. Every problem I have, with family or on the farm, I tell him, for example: 'I don't have any money', and he gives me some" [Ionana]

To summarise, vertical sources of power—where power is exercised by those who possess superior status—and horizontal sources of power—where power is exercised by peers—are identified. Furthermore, a distinction is drawn between power used to dominate other groups and power that contributes towards helping other groups achieve greater levels of well-being.

How Do EE Migrant Women Working on Strawberry Farms in Huelva Cope With Oppression?

As we see from the narratives, the female interviewees react to oppression both cognitively and behaviourally. A *cognitive response*—resignation to and redefinition of oppression—means evaluating the conditions of oppression they are experiencing. Meanwhile, a behavioural response implies taking action—conservative and

transformational on an interpersonal level—which they resort to when faced with these conditions of oppression.

Cognitive Response

Resignation emerges when the respondents fail to conceptualise the oppression they are experiencing as a situation of injustice. This invites a notion of self-surrender, giving themselves up to their employers and other sources of oppression. This relates to feelings of helplessness, brought about by a history of lacking predictive control, which leads to a naturalisation of the situation they are experiencing (Montero, 2004). Resignation involves feelings and attitudes of conformity, tolerance and patience when faced with adversity. It manifests itself through victim-blaming (Ryan, 1976), internalised oppression (Martín-Baró, 1986), and learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975).

Victim-blaming emerges when the respondents naturalise oppression, believing that victims are responsible for their current situation and state of disadvantage (Ryan, 1976). On the one hand, it manifests itself in the belief that many women are to blame for the sexist treatment they receive from some men; for example, because of how they dress or because they are an 'easy lay'.

> "When you do not want a relationship with a man you can't go out with him... some women drink alcohol, get drunk and are then raped and who knows what... When you go out alone, there are drunk men and they see a girl who is young or prettier, but the two of them are to blame" [Natalia]

As portrayed by Sofia, victim-blaming is observed in the work environment, citing internal reasons (e.g., lack of effort, inability) for leaving the job, rather than as a consequence of workplace exploitation: 'They couldn't cope with the work. It's very hard... one had back pain and sore kidneys, and left'.

Internalised oppression (Martín-Baró, 1986), for its part, stems from cases of sexual assault. The idea emerges that victims of this type of violence are reluctant to explain the details because they feel ashamed that people might blame them for what happened. Nela expresses it as follows: 'We've only heard about it, nobody is going to say anything to you, because if it happened to me I would be ashamed to say so'.

Learned helplessness is observed when respondents realise that accommodation and living conditions on the farms cannot be improved. This belief is part of the psychological dynamics of oppression. Those who experience helplessness tend to believe in the existence of a just world in which everyone has what they deserve, and act in a conformist and obedient way towards authority figures (Lerner & Miller, 1978; Seligman, 1975). This situation is created and maintained by the context, which, through mechanisms of oppression, means that there is little chance for improvement or opportunity, and the respondents thereby internalise that they have what they deserve. They are subordinate to organisations and employers who control, monitor and manage their lives, being considered passive workers who are unable to effect change, as well as lacking rights (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Laura reflects on how they feel helpless about their employment status and health:

> "There is nothing that can be improved. There's nothing because the work is really hard. Who can cope with it stays. Who can't cope with it doesn't stay. Lots of people are leaving, they can't cope with it"

Redefinition emerges when the interviewees give a new meaning or sense to the oppression they experience on an interpersonal level and to the social stereotype discourse perceived of them. As a consequence, their belonging to a social group does not place them in a discriminatory position. Through redefinition, the respond-

ents offer new meanings and content to these mechanisms of oppression and in their interactions with bosses, the local population and the context. Some interviewees try to focus on the positives of the experience they are going through. Veronica gives an example of this:

> "Spaniards love us, but many things have happened and that's why […] They don't trust us, because as I have heard, they think that we come here to steal their jobs"

Although Veronica acknowledges that stereotypes prevail among the local population, these women try not to generalise by stating that only some people hold these opinions.

However, while some of them redefine the oppression they experience, they also redirect it towards other groups that they consider unlike their own and from which they want to differentiate themselves. One such example comes through the words of Sandra, who attempts to defy oppression by opposing the generalisations that the local population makes about their group and explaining the differences between Bulgarians and Romanians.

> "We are not all equal (referring to Romanians, Roma Gypsies and Bulgarians). We have five fingers on our hands and they're not the same. But for one, we all pay the same" [Sandra]

Behavioural Response

The respondents display a series of behavioural responses to address conditions of oppression. The different answers that emerged were grouped into conservative or transformational, which allows for a distinction between passively and actively discriminated minorities (Echevarría, González, Garaigordobil, & Villarreal, 1995). Passively discriminated minorities do not undertake behaviours to modify the status quo, whereas active ones facilitate and generate transformation processes. In this study, the transformation processes that emerge do so on an interpersonal level, with individuals engaging in acts and relationships that mostly generate an image of determination, confidence and trust.

Conservative responses are behaviours that emerge in response to situations of oppression, and which do not elicit any change. Strategies include adaptation, evasion, and staying on the farm or leaving.

Adaptation is observed when respondents say that they have become accustomed to the job requirements; to misinformation about working conditions ('There are people with really bad backs, it hurts me but I work with a support belt...', Nela); to restrictions on movement; to the living conditions; to living far from urban centres; and even to the demands regarding how they dress, showing no attempts to overturn the oppressive context.

> "The boss doesn't want shorts on women ... when we're working, not too low-cut t-shirts, we have to respect... what he wants" [Veronica]

Evasion emerges from behaviours that allow them to escape from the reality surrounding them. This is an emotion-based strategy for coping with the stress caused by oppression. As stated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), who used the term escape-avoidance, these strategies have a strong adaptive function. For example, this is shown when ignoring or claiming unawareness of cases of sexual assault.

> "I heard that (about sexual assault) in other years there was someone who didn't show respect, but I was not working there" [Laura]

Another form of escape is taking part in leisure activities. These allow the women to establish social relationships and get a break from where they work and live. This involves going to nearby towns where they can spend a few hours shopping, head to a café, go for a walk or make phone calls. For example, Sabina says: 'In town... we stroll around, do a bit of window shopping, grab a juice, go to Mercadona (Spanish brand supermarket)...'

Staying on the farm or leaving. Leaving the farm is seen as a response to gender-based oppression. Here women escape the conditions by leaving the farm that is violating their rights, choosing to go to others where they know they will be respected. In some cases they seek work in other parts of Spain or even return to their countries of origin.

> "The boss of where I worked a few years ago... 'Do you want to have a coffee with me?' I said, 'No, I already have people to have a coffee with', and I left. I haven't worked at that company again" [Veronica]

Staying on the farm emerges as a way to protect themselves from possible dangers. In other words, they fear that a change might result in worse treatment or further rights violations. They make sure that every year they go back to a farm they already know, and know what they will find. They reach agreements with the farm owners at the end of the season, contact them from their home country, and create an information-sharing, informal network between family and friends.

> "In another farm no, you're not at home, you don't know the people, there are lots of bad people" [Adriana]

Transformational responses are behaviours that emerge as a response to situations of oppression at the interpersonal level, which seek to change power relationships at said level. Strategies include confrontation and social networking.

Confrontation comes from the daily actions that the respondents take to claim their rights and confront oppression at an interpersonal level (e.g., expressing dissatisfaction with the treatment received). This strategy emerges when the participants fail to identify the oppression taking place at a structural level but recognise it when they experience unfair interpersonal treatment. The citations mainly refer to "attacks" on interpersonal and workplace relations, which the respondents verbally oppose.

> "He wants a good female worker, he asked for proof of having worked in agriculture before. He says 'not fat, not too skinny'.... I nervously said, 'If you wanted a model, I wouldn't have come because I have a mirror at home... I thought you wanted workers. I think that I meet all conditions, I have experience, I have papers, what do you want? I'm no model from a magazine" [Laura]

> "...and in the evening the guy came and said, 'look, you have to understand that the women who come here have a big problem, you're not understood, you don't know the language, and that's a big barrier, you can't shout, because if you shout, they won't understand you', and then he apologized" [Nela]

Social networking. The respondents talk about different systems of informal relationships through which migrant workers interact with others in order to improve their working or living conditions, and to provide mutual, emotional and instrumental support (e.g., sharing information about accommodation, employment, shopping). These networks come with social benefits, among which is the ability to help transform existing power relations

at an interpersonal level. Informal networks—comprising friends, relatives back home or in the host country and compatriots—are based on cooperation.

"I've made lots of friends here... they've told me how to speak... they take me shopping and to places where they go" [Magda]

What has also emerged is the creation of social support networks in collaboration with bosses, which at times provide them with resources to help improve their living conditions. For example, Ionana says the following about her boss: 'I tell him my problem, and if he can, he takes me home in his or in his wife's car...'

"You tell the truth to the supervisor, she understands you and understands everything. If you feel bad, she'll do anything for you… If you don't have a car and you don't feel well, you go to where she is" [Laura]

The mechanisms of oppression—exclusion, exploitation, manipulation and gender domination—and the sources of power that emerge from the interviews—employers, supervisors, agents and other female workers— paint a scenario characterised by a power asymmetry that is based on breaches of labour rights, human rights and the rights of migrant women. These women respond with cognitive—resignation and redefinition—and behavioural—conservative and transformational—responses to oppression. However, while present, the transformational responses are less varied and less common in the respondents' narratives and do not extend beyond the interpersonal level. This highlights the need to create a sense of shared identity among these female workers, which encourages the sharing of experiences and feelings as a starting point to begin the acquisition processes of critical consciousness and liberation from oppression (Luque-Ribelles, García-Ramírez, & Portillo, 2009).

Conclusions

This research introduces innovations in the study of migrant women working on strawberry farms in Huelva province across two levels. On a theoretical level, it incorporates the LP perspective as a cornerstone for analysing the situation of migrant female workers. On a methodological level, it fits within the tradition of qualitative research by using thematic analysis (Rappaport, 2000).

LP provides a diagnosis of the reality, taking into account that the workers are women as well as migrants with limited resources and little knowledge of the Spanish language, which puts them in an oppressive situation characterised by an overlapping of various oppressive conditions. It also views power asymmetry as a core dimension of the analysis. The approach allows us to identify and classify the different mechanisms of oppression that women experience, and portrays them as active agents who respond cognitively and behaviourally to this oppression. Qualitative methodology invites us to appreciate the perspectives of migrant women working on Huelva's strawberry farms, showing how they experience their working conditions, how they perceive the autochthonous population, which sources of power they are able to identify, and how they respond to oppression.

The number of participants, recruitment strategies and design should allow us to appropriately place the study's outcomes in context. Interviewing twenty-five people, however, produces a small number of narratives. While theoretical saturation has been addressed, this does not excuse the fact that the transferability of results may

be limited. We suggest that future studies include a larger number of participants. The limited access we were given to the seven farms whose owners granted us permission to enter, together with the voluntary nature of participation, have reduced the diversity of perspectives in relation to experiences of oppression, as well as the strategies used to address them. Although the need for a diversity of profiles has been satisfied, it is possible that only a specific population segment was represented, excluding other more hidden ones. Furthermore, replicating the study in other female migrant groups, with similar characteristics and in other contexts, would provide greater validity.

The findings of this study present a number of implications for social policies and community-based initiatives. Measures are needed that provide women with more information—both at origin and destination—about their working and living conditions, rights and other issues that may affect them. This would help protect them from experiencing situations of oppression and learned helplessness, and would equip them with the transformational strategies needed to address these challenges and avoid competition with other oppressed groups living alongside them. Moreover, it would help them to be recognised as citizens with rights, and not merely cheap and infra-humanised foreign labour.

Additionally, these measures should encourage open dialogue between the local population and female migrant workers, building on the concept of migration so it is understood more as a process of cultural enrichment than one of competition (Sherif & Sherif, 1979). These encounters should promote interpersonal relationships; facilitate the social participation of migrant women—for example, in labour unions, community-based associations; and allow them to share their life experiences and strengths. This would help create a collective feeling and establish common goals around shared feelings, the notion of well-being and social justice. Providing migrant workers with Spanish language training would also promote interpersonal relationships and access to rights. Finally, offering cultural skills and gender and feminist perspective training to farm owners, employers, supervisors and other external agents would equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide fair treatment, secure jobs and suitable living conditions which respect labour rights and adhere to current legislation. This would mean that strawberry workers are respected as workers, migrants and women, while protecting their health and contributing to their well-being.

Competing Interests

One of the authors is a member of the Editorial Board of Psychological Thought, but she has not reviewed, neither edited this article. The other authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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