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ARTICLE

Labor Discipline and Domestic Service during the Late Franco Dictatorship in Spain: An Approach in Three Stages (1960–1975)

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Abstract

Although Franco's dictatorship in Spain was rooted in the repression of the labor movement and the working class, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed political and social changes that enabled the anti-Franco unions to achieve better conditions for workers. However, domestic workers were denied these improvements due to their exclusion from the formal labor system. This exclusion kept domestic workers in the informal sector and ensured their continued feminization and precarity. This article contributes to debates on the level of coercion in non-productive work by examining labor discipline in the Spanish domestic service during the 1960s and 1970s. It follows Marcel van der Linden's proposal to focus on three defining stages of labor discipline: entry, work and exit. Although the working conditions and identities of Spanish domestic workers in the 1960s and 1970s have been studied, coercion and resistance have rarely been put at the center of analysis. Doing so introduces Spanish domestic labor into the study of coerced work, showing how it was affected by global features such as migration, feminization, all-day work, and control over workers' bodies. This paper sees labor discipline as dialectically constructed, shaped by both adherence to and negation of established norms. Therefore, it is important to study both how domestic workers complied with rules set by employers and how everyday forms of resistance challenged labor discipline and thus contributed to its refinement. Some of these forms of resistance (petty theft, change of employment) caused confrontation, while others (marriage) fell within accepted moral and legal boundaries. The article is based on a wide range of sources, including surveys and reports by Catholic working-class organizations, letters sent by domestic workers to the Elena Francis radio advice program, and court records and newspaper reports about domestic workers' theft. These sources make it possible to analyze labor discipline from different perspectives, showing variation in mistresses' coercive measures, domestic workers' attitude towards coercion, and autonomous practices against household discipline. While this paper focuses specifically on the intersection between class and gender in late Franco Spain, it contributes to labor and coercion studies in other geographical and historical contexts.

Keywords: labor discipline; coercion; resistance; Franco-Era; domestic service

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Coercion at work in nonproductive labor during the 20th century in the Global North is a growing area of study. This paper aims to integrate the Spanish context into this historiographical corpus by examining labor discipline in Spanish domestic service during the 1960s and 1970s, following Marcel van der Linden's methodology[1]. Labor discipline is defined here as the various tools that are used to encourage or coerce workers to work. Although the working conditions and identities of domestic workers in Spain during the 1960s and 1970s have already been studied by Eider de Dios Fernández and Aritza Sáenz del Castillo, coercion and, even less so, resistance, have not been the core subject matters. Doing so makes it possible to introduce Spanish domestic service into labor and coercion studies and focus on how it was affected by global domestic labor features such as migration, feminization, all-day work, or control over bodies[2]. This paper examines the making of labor discipline at the three main stages—entry, work, and exit—in the cities of Madrid and Barcelona. The two cities were selected for their abundance of available sources and their ability to attract national immigrants and provide employment opportunities for domestic workers. Furthermore, this analysis presupposes that labor discipline is dialectically constructed, so it is shaped by both adherence to and negation of established norms. Therefore, examining how domestic workers complied with the rules set by employing families, as well as how they crafted autonomous and daily forms of resistance that challenged and thus contributed to the construction of labor discipline, is essential. Coercion builds labor discipline, as did workers' resistance through negotiation and setting limits. That is why this paper is also about how domestic workers defied labor discipline on a day-to-day basis which, although they might not necessarily have had an ideological or political intention, meant they did have the capacity to break with some of the coercive practices in domestic service[3]. Furthermore, the kinds of autonomous performances developed by the maids can be enlightening regarding labor discipline's boundaries. Focusing on petty theft, marriage as a job exit, and changing households shows the differences in employers' reactions. That some of these actions generated confrontations and others did not is due to their connection to legal and moral boundaries.

Franco's dictatorship was established in Spain through a Civil War (1936–1939) and consolidated through the severe repression of the labor movement. Communists, anarchists, and republicans were imprisoned or executed, and the rights to association and to strike were banned, along with a wide range of other political rights. However, from the 1960s onward, during the so-called desarrollismo (developmentalism) period (1959–1975), economic and social changes, along with international pressure, forced the dictatorship to undertake a process of modernization. The transformation enabled Spain to join the economic cycles of the Global North to benefit from profit growth and rising consumption. Labor discipline was also modernized, and the regime permitted new forms of negotiation between workers and employers. Although these mechanisms were tightly controlled by the state and strikes remained illegal, they were used by the clandestine anti-Francoist labor movement to improve working conditions for many and to confront the dictatorship politically[4].

Economic development was accompanied by political changes driven by growing pressure from civil society. Workers' and social movements forced the regime to

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implement certain reforms in order to survive. Consequently, this period has been designated as the tardofranquismo (Late Francoism) from a political-institutional perspective. These years were characterized by intense conflict between the regime and social and trade union movements. While social struggles prevented the continuation of the dictatorship in its existing form, they did not bring about a complete rupture. As a result, the subsequent Transición española (Spanish Transition) was marked not only by the achievement of democratic political rights, but also by enduring economic and social continuities[5].

In this context, in 1961, the Ley sobre Derechos Políticos, Profesionales y de Trabajo de la Mujer (Law on Women's Political, Professional and Labor Rights) was passed granting women the same workplace rights as men. As Jessica Davidson points out, the key actor lobbying for the law was the Sección Femenina. The female branch of the fascist National-Catholic single-party Falange Española pushed for this law. Despite its paternalistic nature, Sección Femenina was somewhat more flexible than the male branch of Falange Española, and it tried to increase its popularity through this law. Prior to 1961, women had been legally subjected to wage discrimination clauses, stricter rules for registering at employment offices, compulsory dismissal upon marriage, and a ban on holding positions of responsibility in public administration, such as judges, tax collectors, and labor inspectors. After 1961, labor regulations were gradually amended to eliminate mandatory dismissal clauses for marriage, and women began to be given positions of responsibility in both private companies and the public sector. However, wage discrimination persisted due to women's overrepresentation in precarious jobs and the difficulty they faced in accessing salary supplements such as the family bonus, which was generally awarded to male workers. Moreover, the percentage of women in the labor force remained very low. Although the number of working women in Spain grew from 15.8 percent of the total labor force in 1950 to 19.6 percent in 1970 and 24.8 percent in 1981, it remained significantly lower than in other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries. For instance, in the United States, 50 percent of working-age women were employed in 1980—twice that of Spain. And in 1950, the female labor force participation rate was around 30 percent in Italy and Switzerland, and close to 40 percent in the United Kingdom. By 1970, the rate had dipped slightly in Italy but had risen to over 40 percent in the United Kingdom and 50 percent in Switzerland[6].

Spanish domestic workers remained excluded from such dynamics. They were not covered by the 1961 law because domestic service was not legally recognized as a form of employment in Spain. As a result, the sector remained informal, preserving its traditional features of precariousness and gendered labor. Exclusion from labor protections generated specific forms and degrees of coercion that did not affect workers integrated into the formal labor system—primarily men and skilled workers. As Natalie Sedacca, Magaly Rodríguez García, Nitin Sinha, Judy Fudge, and Kendra Strauss have pointed out, the legal and institutional frameworks that expand or restrict workers' freedoms depend on multiple factors, including levels of coercion and resistance. Coercion in domestic labor is therefore a key concept here, referring to the strategies used by employers to ensure the transformation of labor power into actual work[7].

Meanwhile, precariousness and informality also made it hard for domestic workers to develop effective protest repertoires and the main anti-Franco unionism did not

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pay attention to them. Nevertheless, as other authors have claimed, the victim perspective needs to be challenged[8]. Despite their marginalization under the labor law, scholars such as Aritza Sáenz del Castillo have argued that the modernization associated with the developmentalism era also transformed the domestic service labor market. According to Sáenz del Castillo, the supply of domestic workers declined during the 1960s and 1970s, which increased the bargaining power of those remaining in the workforce. Although the actual number of domestic workers in Spain remains uncertain because they were excluded from formal labor statistics, unofficial data from Cáritas' FOESSA Foundation estimated that the number of domestic workers stood at around 1 million in 1970. Domestic service continued to be a primary means of subsistence for a significant proportion of Spanish women. Meanwhile the 1970 census recorded a total of 1,794,116 female workers, meaning that, according to FOESSA estimates, domestic workers made up over half or some 55.7 percent of the female labor force[9].

As Eider de Dios Fernández has shown through oral history, new expectations began to emerge among domestic workers. Whereas in earlier periods domestic service served as a way to escape the post-war economic hardship, from the 1960s onward it increasingly became a transitional occupation for rural migrants—a way to reach the city, save some money, get married, and then leave the workforce. In short, domestic service shifted from being an end in itself to a means of social advancement for many working-class women. The state sought to address this changing reality by creating the Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico (National Domestic Service Mutual Aid) in 1959, a welfare institution for maids overseen by the Instituto Nacional de Previsión (National Institute of Social Security) and managed by the Sección Femenina. Due to its limited budget, minimal subsidies, and disciplinary orientation, most domestic workers did not join the institution[10].

Regarding sources, the main documentation used for this paper are surveys and reports by the Catholic, left-wing organization, the Juventud Obrera Cristiana (JOC) (Young Christian Workers); letters sent to the El Consultorio de Elena Francis (the Elena Francis Agony Aunt) radio show; judicial records of theft in Madrid; and news articles about thefts by domestic workers in the daily newspaper ABC.

The JOC surveys and reports can be viewed in the Archivo de Acción Católica Española (Spanish Catholic Action Archive), which is stored in the Archivo General de la Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca (General Archive of the Pontifical University of Salamanca). The JOC was keen to create spaces for democratic politicization and their methodology was based on knowing working conditions in order to change them; thus, they are an invaluable resource for both the volume of surveys and studies they carried out as well as their role as a communication tool for domestic workers. The Elena Francis radio program was an advice show featuring letters from listeners, mostly women, asking for advice on various topics. Although Elena Francis was supposed to be real, she did not exist; instead, the responses were written by scriptwriters, priests, and psychologists with a moral and commercial agenda tied to the company sponsoring the show, the Instituto de Belleza Francis (the Francis Beauty Institute)[11]. The letters are available at the Arxiu Comarcal del Baix Llobregat (Regional Archive of the Baix Llobregat) and are useful in providing access to workers' voices without external mediation, especially when considering that the archived letters are not necessarily

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those that were broadcast, so they were not censored. Hundreds of thousands of women wrote to the program during its 40 years on the air; 4,070 letters are currently available. Among them, fifty-seven letters written by domestic workers between 1958 and 1977 were considered.

The criminal court files of the Archivo Territorial Judicial de Madrid (Madrid Territorial Judicial Archive) from 1962 to 1964—the only years available during the 1960s and 1970s were also examined. Among the thousands of judicial files contained there, twenty-two cases of theft by domestic workers dated between 1959 and 1963 were found. Due to the limited files available from the Archivo Judicial Territorial de Madrid (AJTM), qualitative analysis of other similar events reported in ABC, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Spain in the 1960s and 1970s, was also undertaken[12]. I have thus analyzed another forty cases that took place in Madrid and Barcelona between 1959 and 1976.

Entering work: women with no other options

According to research by Aritza Sáenz del Castillo and Eider de Dios Fernández, hiring practices within the domestic service sector in Spain during the 1960s and 1970s did not typically involve coercive methods[13]. Nonetheless, the lack of direct coercion in the hiring process did not imply freedom of choice, as women's options were shaped by class and gender dynamics. Historians such as Heide Gerstenberger and Ellen Meiksins Wood, along with philosophers like Soren Mau, have underscored the importance of impersonal relationships in understanding why workers might accept a subordinate position in the labor relationship without the presence of personal coercion[14].

Although the hiring of domestic workers did not involve coercion, it was influenced by various conditions that preclude describing the choice as entirely free. The sociological profile of women engaged in domestic service during the 1960s and 1970s reveals factors that shaped access to this work related to class and gender. Documentation highlights a specific demographic prevalent among those employed as domestic workers in major cities like Madrid and Barcelona—young, migrant women, predominantly from rural backgrounds and large, resource-scarce families, who had constrained employment alternatives due to their limited education.

The global migration experience has already been pointed out as a crucial feature of paid reproductive labor by authors such as Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, Christiane Harzig, Eleonore Kofman, and Pavarti Raghuram. Although migration is a key point in this context too, an international component to reproductive labor is not seen in Spanish domestic service until the 1980s[15]. Until that time, most domestic workers were national migrants from rural regions such as Castilla, Extremadura, or Andalucía[16]. A 1958 survey by the priest and sociologist Jesús María Vázquez published by the Instituto Nacional de Previsión (National Welfare Institute) found that among 160 maids, 43 were from Castilla, 24 from Extremadura, and 13 from Andalucía[17]. If anything, a regional division of reproductive labor can be asserted, while a gender and class division in reproductive labor is also noticeable[18].

The families employing domestic workers were wealthy, while the workers themselves were from low-income and working-class families. According to Vázquez's survey, employers were typically property owners, senior officials, or highly paid

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professionals. The *Informe Sociológico sobre la Situación Social de España* (*Sociological Report on the Social Situation of Spain*) in 1966 analyzed family composition based on the occupation and income of the head of the house, drawing from a sample of 2,456 families. While instances of laborers hiring domestic workers were rare, it was common practice among liberal professionals, directors, executives, and large employers. Moreover, households with incomes exceeding 30,500 pesetas employed, on average, more than one domestic worker per family, whereas those earning less than 12,500 pesetas hired fewer than one maid per every six families[19]. Domestic workers were always women, from large, low-income families, who started working at a young age to alleviate their parents' financial burden and help support their families[20].

An early working start was commonplace; for example, a Madrid housewife once sought to hire a 15 or 16-year-old girl through the Elena Francis program, a request likely easily fulfilled given the abundance of domestic workers who started their careers at such a young age[21]. A 1967 survey by the JOC found that among 165 domestic employees in Madrid, most began working between the ages of 14 and 17[22]. In Vázquez's 1958 survey, one-third of domestic workers also began working around the same age, with 64 percent starting between 11 and 20 years old, and only 22 percent taking a job at 20 years or older[23]. Another JOC report in 1976 found that among 208 surveyed, nearly one-third began working between the ages of 11 and 14. The predominance of young women in this sector was influenced by the view that female work, particularly for live-in maids, was a temporary phase before marriage[24]. Additionally, hiring younger workers was likely cheaper. A 1970 JOC manifesto, based on 750 women surveyed, highlighted a link between youth and lower wages in the sector, a notion confirmed by a 1976 study showing that girls aged 14 to 16 years earned on average half as much as those older than them. Thus, the lower wages commanded by younger maids may have increased their demand, perpetuating the influx of young women into this employment sector[25].

Women often found themselves in a position where they had to help support their families, circumstances highlighted by a July 1960 JOC report featuring testimonials from several women working in Madrid. Lourdes, one of the respondents who had seven brothers and sisters, shared, "There wasn't enough for everyone. My siblings were young. I thought about working. I couldn't in the village, so I came here." Similarly, another respondent named María del Carmen noted, "I couldn't live in the village either. My family needed my wage, and there was no work there."[26] Their stories were not unique. According to Vázquez's survey, 94 percent of domestic workers' fathers were small ranchers, farmers, or laborers, 19 percent were marginalized by being fatherless, and 3 percent had unemployed fathers. Additionally, 58 percent had between three and six siblings[27]. A 1967 JOC survey in Madrid showed similar findings: 57 percent of respondents cited their family's financial situation as a factor in their decision to work as maids, with 33 percent stating their fathers were farmers, 20 percent laborers, and 12 percent reporting having no father. Furthermore, 70 percent reported having between three and six siblings[28].

The lack of alternative opportunities was crucial here too. Bourgeois or working-class women with other options did not choose domestic service. Young and migrant women did not choose domestic work freely; rather, they were driven by economic necessity and a scarcity of alternatives. Documents regarding domestic workers from

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the JOC's IX National Council highlighted that the main aspirations of these women were in fact either employment in the textile sector or marriage. Those who could, preferred to enter the industrial sector, but migrants found it harder to access these jobs compared to locals[29]. The experience of a woman named Juana Navas—former domestic worker and trade unionist after Franco's death—illustrates this point: after several years in Madrid, her application to a textile factory remained unanswered[30]. Vázquez's research further underscores this dynamic. When asked about their preferred professions, 36 percent of the domestic workers surveyed wished to be dressmakers, 31 percent sought to be wealthy enough to not have to work, 16 percent preferred being housewives, and 10 percent aimed to be teachers. Only 6 percent of those surveyed expressed the desire to remain maids[31]. A June 1976 JOC report on domestic workers in Madrid found that 69 percent chose the job due to a lack of other professional choices, and a mere 3 percent because they liked it[32]. The epistolary archive of the Elena Francis program contains the accounts of women whose expectations weren't met upon arriving in Barcelona, and who consequently resorted to domestic work. For instance, in January 1963, a woman wrote of arriving in Barcelona with high hopes, only to have them quickly dashed, stating "I thought of starting in an office or a factory, but since I don't know anyone in Barcelona and had no one to introduce me, I had to start serving."[33]

The predominance of young, migrant women from low-income families in domestic work reflected the nuanced constraints within ostensibly free labor relationships. This reality, however, does not imply that these women were devoid of agency or strategies to navigate their employment conditions. A notable manifestation of this agency was the preference for live-in positions among domestic workers. According to the Mutualidad Nacional de Empleados del Hogar (National Mutual Society of Home Employees)—Montepío Nacional del Servicio Doméstico's successor since 1969, the proportion of live-out domestic workers at the national level was 14 percent in 1970, increasing to 25 percent by 1975. On a provincial scale, approximately one-fifth of Madrid's and a quarter of Barcelona's domestic workers were registered as live-outs in 1972 and 1973, respectively[34]. Although state figures may not fully capture the actual numbers due to the significant proportion of unregistered domestic workers, non-state sources report similar trends. In Vázquez's 1958 study, for example, only 28 percent of households employed live-out maids[35]. Furthermore, a June 1976 JOC report on domestic employees in Madrid found that just 23 percent expressed a preference for live-out arrangements[36]. The inclination toward live-in positions underscores the complex interplay of economic necessity and the pursuit of better employment terms within the constraints of available choices.

The predominance of live-in work could be attributed to demand issues in the labor market, yet it appears that the vast majority of workers preferred this work arrangement because it provided housing, that live-in jobs provided, particularly appealing for young migrants newly arrived in the city. Several women wrote to the Elena Francis show asking for a room in exchange for their work. Examples include a maid who offered to care for elderly ladies if a room was provided for her and her husband, and another who stated she could not afford a room "as they have become very expensive," and was willing to work in the house during the afternoons if accommodation was offered. Notably, while the JOC launched campaigns encouraging domestic workers

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to move to live-out work as a pathway to independence, their efforts were met with limited success.[37]

Work itself: disciplined workers

Once the hiring process concluded and a worker joined the household, the unequal nature of the labor relationship became even more apparent. Despite evolving over the decades, it cannot be claimed—as is sometimes done—that starting in the 1960s, this relationship began to shed its more paternalistic hues, becoming an ordinary one between employers and employees[38]. Certain elements of commitment, pride, recognition, and deeply entrenched paternalistic loyalty persisted[39]. The precarious integration of workers into the family unit remained a recurrent theme in the testimonies of the women[40]. For instance, María Palomo's employer regarded the maid as "part of the family," yet this designation did not exempt her from household chores for 38 years[41]. Many domestic workers also faced the imposition of uniforms, despite their protests. Loli, a migrant domestic worker in Barcelona, wrote to the JOC publication, the *Boletín de Empleadas de Hogar* (*Household Employees Bulletin*), criticizing uniforms as symbols of distinction and submission enforced by employers, and describing the trauma she felt at having to wear one[42]. Similarly, Marijuana wrote to Sección Femenina's magazine *Nuestra Casa* (*Our House*), recounting how her employer insisted that she wear her uniform outdoors, despite her persistent objections[43]. It was challenging for domestic workers to be treated as family members while simultaneously being subjected to symbols of subordination and distinction.

Therefore, upon examining workers' testimonies, it becomes evident that the majority did not feel integrated into the families they served. Numerous files from the JOC document women's complaints about the degrading treatment they received. In a "round-table discussion with domestic employees," one summarized the relationship with her family as being "no relationship—they call me when they need me." Additional examples abound, such as workers being barred from sitting on the sofa while the family watched television or feeling disregarded when attempting to join conversations[44]. The contradiction between purported inclusion in the family unit and exclusion due to the labor relationship did not escape them. In the action plan for domestic employees of the XXV National Council of the JOC, it was denounced that despite being made to believe they were part of the family, domestic employees suffered segregation within the home,[45] including having to eat in the kitchen and to use the service elevator or a separate bathroom. Similarly, in the March-April 1971 issue of JOC's household worker bulletin, paternalistic relationships were harshly criticized, with the recurring phrase "you will be like family" being contrasted with demands to be treated as workers and not as alleged family members[46].

The complaints were not exclusive to JOC supporters. Many of the workers who wrote in to the Elena Francis program were acutely aware of the employing family's control over their work and even over themselves. Some explicitly requested that replies be sent by letter only because they listened to the radio with their mistress and feared her reaction. "I hope to be answered by letter since, when I listen to the radio, I do so together with my mistress, and it would upset me greatly if she found out about this letter, which she would take very badly."[47]

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At the same time, the paternalistic relationship between the family and the workers was deeply influenced by gender dynamics that heightened the level of surveillance. Juana Navas recounted her experience of bringing up many children "like a mother" and shares an anecdote where, upon arriving to visit the sick child of the household in the hospital, the mother informed the child that his "real mother" had come, referring to Juana as the one who had raised him. Consequently, she had to make multiple visits to the hospital to feed the boy, as he would only eat for her. However, she also acknowledges the one-sided nature of these caregiving relationships. Despite making the effort to visit children from previous households she had worked in, no family had ever reached out to inquire about her[48]. Furthermore, the gendered perception that the maid, often a young woman, was someone over whom they had complete authority led to extreme cases, such as one where a mistress arranged her maid's marriage without her consent:

> I am a maid who has been in the same house for six years. I arrived when I was 14 years old and now, as you can see, I am 20. Well, in this house they love me very much like a daughter. A year ago, I met a boy, and since then, I have been going out with him, loving him more each day, seeing that he reciprocated. When he proposed, I said yes. Now, the owners of this house where I am staying told me that my fiancé would come tomorrow afternoon. I asked who he was, and my mistress said he was her nephew who wanted to marry me. They have no children, and they want me as their own daughter (….) When I found out that I was going to be married off to someone I didn't know, I went to cry in my room. The mistress came and told me that she had always loved me like a daughter and that she wanted me to marry her nephew, just like she had married off her daughter. She said that she had a daughter who died, and she promised to her cousin, the mother of this nephew, that she would marry them off. When she died, she knew that the boy would be in good hands, and now he is in a boarding school, and this is his last year. I cried and told her that I already had a boyfriend and that I couldn't leave him because I would die of grief without him. And now she won't let me leave, and she says I can only go out with her cousin.[49]

Although incidents like this were uncommon, harassment was not rare. Anitha Menon et al. propose a definition that highlights the perspective of the victim:

> Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects a person's employment or education, unreasonably interferes with a person's work or educational performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive working or learning environment.[50]

For this paper's purpose, it should be enough to understand sexual harassment at work as any unwanted comment, gesture, insinuation, or physical contact with sexual connotations. Furthermore, a common feature of all these approaches to the issue is that they emphasize the importance of addressing sexual abuse at work as an expression of particular forms of domination. This standpoint asserts that sexual abuse in the workplace is a manifestation of gendered power dynamics that subjugate women sexually due to

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their gender. They are also the result of power relations characterized by labor exploitation, which would subjugate women workers because of their status as a particularly precarious dispossessed labor force. The precarity of women's employment was not a matter of chance, but rather a consequence of a market in which competition between workers to sell their labor privileged access to men over women, who were relegated to less valued work, informal work, domestic work, and family unpaid work[51].

In the context of domestic service, daily coexistence and a profound paternalistic labor relationship rendered this occupation susceptible to sexual abuse[52]. However, the incidences of abuse are difficult to quantify given the available sources. Nevertheless, despite the stigma associated with discussing sexual abuse, three of the letters from household workers to the Elena Francis radio program reported such cases. The incidents ranged from nonconsensual fondling by a son in the household to unwanted pregnancy because of relationships with the employer, often involving some form of deception. Moreover, in none of the letters did the workers express confidence that their mistress would understand[53]. Juana Navas relayed how, while it did not happen to her, she knew of two women who had become pregnant because of nonconsensual relations with their employers. Additionally, she noted that when the mistresses of the household discovered the situation, it was common for them to cast the pregnant worker out onto the street[54]. It was this fear which might have led a single 26-year-old servant to be convicted of infanticide in Madrid in 1959. The court's judgment stated that the woman had become pregnant by a married man and, to conceal her dishonor, gave birth without assistance. She cut the umbilical cord clumsily, resulting in the child's death. While it is true that in this case it cannot be ascertained whether the married man was her employer or not, it underscores the strong stigma associated with a single maid becoming pregnant[55].

Paternalistic discipline was also effective in replacing the wage relationship and reducing the cost of labor power in many cases. A Barcelona maid related how her mistress did not pay her a salary but bought her essentials or provided funds to make purchases as needed[56]. Another reported that she never needed to join the national mutual aid society because her employers covered her expenses when she fell ill[57]. However, most workers typically received a salary. Salaries increased significantly during the 1960s and 1970s. Data indicates that the most common monthly salary rose from between 400 and 499 pesetas in 1958 to between 7,000 and 9,000 in 1976. This growth was considerable (around 1,800 percent)—even when compared with price increases in the same period (412 percent)—but lagged behind the majority of workers' salary increases[58].

While bonuses were uncommon, indirect forms of compensation were prevalent. According to Vázquez, half of the workers he surveyed occasionally received gifts from their employer such as shoes, handbags, or handkerchiefs, and a quarter received clothes. Many migrant women turned to domestic service upon arriving in a city because as domestic help they were often provided with housing, food, and gifts. As a result, 61 percent of the workers surveyed by Vázquez in 1958 had managed to save despite their low salaries, and 56 percent could even support their families. However, the living conditions often fell short. Successive JOC documents emphasize that domestic workers were typically assigned the worst rooms—dark, cramped spaces adjacent to the kitchen, often used for storage at the same time[59].

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Regarding work schedules, long working hours, lack of holidays, and scarcity of free time remained largely unchanged during the period in question. Live-in maids did not have fixed hours, so they had to be available all day and even all night if a child cried or someone fell ill. Juana Navas commented on how a live-in job required being available 24 hours a day, even having to bring a glass of milk to a member of the household in bed[60]. This translated into workdays that, for the vast majority, lasted between 10 and 17 hours according to surveys and studies from 1962, 1967, 1970, 1972, and 1976. Approximately one quarter of domestic employees had 1 full day off per week, while the rest had only one or two afternoons off. This number remained constant. By 1976, the average maid working between 10 and 17 hours a day with 1 day off a week earned between 17.16 and 37.5 pesetas an hour, far below the 88.6 pesetas that a skilled textile worker averaged and the 145.87 pesetas earned by a skilled metal worker[61]. As for holidays, around three-quarters of domestic workers were supposed to have 1 to 2 weeks of holiday per year. However, they were typically spent with the employing families, so it often involved working even harder[62]. The common rate of this phenomenon is demonstrated by a story in the August 1961 issue of the Sección Femenina's magazine *Nuestra Casa* (*Our House*). This magazine tells a naive and sugar-coated story about the intensification of work that family holidays meant for domestic workers[63].

Therefore, although the relationship between employers and employees in domestic service was usually based on an exchange between labor and wage, long days deflated the labor power price. Furthermore, paternalistic coercive methods meant that control over domestic workers went beyond labor power and often meant their bodies and entire existences remained under coercion through sexual harassment, forced marriage, or gendered affective connections.

Working for themselves: rebellious workers

Therefore, it can be asserted that the working conditions for domestic workers were especially harsh even compared to those of other workers. Wages were low, working hours long, and paternalistic relationships not only increased control over their labor power but also over their own gendered bodies. However, domestic workers did not participate solely as victims but instead displayed the capacity to challenge the status quo through a series of everyday practices that, although intended to go unnoticed, reflected the existence of a permanent class struggle because they challenged a hierarchy key to labor discipline. The women overstepped the moral and legal limits imposed on them and consciously resorted to petty theft as a way to derive some direct benefit from a situation of oppression and exploitation. But while this approach is strongly influenced by James Scott[64], it is necessary to point out that the paper argues that intentions are not a defining feature of this kind of resistance. It is the measurable effects on labor discipline that mainly made petty theft a resistance and not the domestic workers' intentions—although that can be a remarkable aspect as well. Theft broke the exchange between wage and labor enabling domestic workers to earn some money without working. Furthermore, from a dialectical approach, it is crucial to highlight the ability of these practices to not only defy labor discipline but also define it through negation and setting limits.

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Twenty-two cases of theft by domestic workers in Madrid between 1959 and 1963 were found in the court records of the AJTM. Of the women involved, only five were married, just six were from Madrid, and only one was partially solvent.

In the cases, a discernible strategy emerges on the part of the workers aimed at ensuring that their left stealing went unnoticed, indicating their awareness of committing a punishable act. One common tactic involved taking low-value items to evade detection. For instance, a domestic worker in Madrid faced trial in January 1960 for stealing 1,000 pesetas from her employer. The interesting point here is that while she discovered an envelope containing 13,000 pesetas when working, she opted to pilfer a single 1,000 pesetas bill[65]. Instances where petty theft escalated until detected by the employers are also prevalent. Stealing items, rather than cash, was more typical, likely due to accessibility rather than intrinsic value. For instance, a domestic worker stole two cameras valued at 1,600 pesetas each and a quantity of silk valued at 9,800 pesetas during the summer of 1962, later selling the items for cash[66]. Similarly, in 1962, a 17-year-old domestic worker from Extremadura faced trial for stealing four sheets, a tablecloth, five towels, a nappy, and scissors, the total value not exceeding 840 pesetas[67].

Excluding cases where the value is unspecified—such as for cutlery, a coffee set, or books—and focusing solely on the AJTM files, which consistently record values in pesetas, we can calculate that the average theft totaled 5,252 pesetas. This amount is relatively modest, particularly considering that the smallest thefts likely went unreported either because they went unnoticed or because there was no perceived benefit in filing a complaint, given the possibility to freely dismiss workers in the absence of a contract.

Not only did the choice of stolen items reflect a conscious strategy, but also the timing of the thefts was carefully considered. The family's summer holidays often presented the perfect opportunity due to the lack of surveillance. One domestic worker, for instance, recognized this opportunity in the summer of 1962. Having worked in the same household for almost half a year, she took advantage of the family's absence to steal jewelry valued at 1,250 pesetas[68]. Another worker, Antonia, pilfered from a neighbor who had entrusted their keys to her employer, stealing two sets of silver cutlery, a gold chain, and a ball gown[69].

Holiday periods were not the only occasions when lax surveillance led to theft. Several cases were brought to trial in which the care for children or the elderly had been exploited. In one instance, a domestic worker in Madrid pocketed a portion of the money given to her to buy clothes for the family's child, while another took advantage of being alone with Doña Orosia Laguna Pardo, an 86-year-old widow, to steal jewels valued at 100,000 pesetas—the highest amount stolen according to the AJTM files[70]. Another notable case occurred in May 1968. Despite being highly regarded by the family she served, Paca, when entrusted with visiting the mistress's elderly mother, succumbed to temptation. Despite her prior exemplary behavior and the praise heaped on her, Paca stole 96,000 pesetas in bills from an open cupboard[71]. This case underscores that obedience did not necessarily reflect genuine conviction or persuasion; it could be nothing more than a performance[72].

On the other hand, it was common in the press to find cases of women posing as servants to rob homes. The amounts stolen were often much greater because there was no need to conceal the theft. While petty theft cases involving domestic workers yielded an average value of 5,252 pesetas, this other type of crime resulted in an average amount of

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134,599 pesetas per theft. Moreover, the impostor servants would typically collaborate with partners to flee the crime scene or hide the stolen items. Both in the press and in court records, it was common for these women to have previous convictions and use false identities.

If these crimes are of interest here, it is because they contributed to a certain alarmism that stigmatized domestic workers as a whole and intensified the scrutiny they faced. This is evident from their disproportionate representation in the mainstream press. While these thefts only account for 13.6 percent of the cases found in the AJTM files (3 out of 22), they represent 67.5 percent of the news stories in ABC (27 out of 40). In terms of content, an article titled "*Sirvienta Ladrona*" (*Thieving Servant)* serves as a prime example of their portrayal. The story begins by highlighting the shortage of domestic workers and how the situation was compelling mistresses to accept workers without references regarding past work conduct. According to the story, Pilar-Carmen, using fake names, took advantage of this predicament by stealing jewelry and items valued at 9,000 pesetas from one house 1 day and several clothing items and two mortar and pestles from another house the next day[73]. Similarly, Doña Abundia and Don Julio fell victim to this problem in April 1966. The couple had been without a maid for several months when Leonor arrived at their doorstep. Poor Doña Abundia, who "was already exhausted from so much scrubbing, cooking, and shaking out rugs," had no choice but to accept the worker into her home despite the absence of a certificate of good conduct. However, Leonor disappeared just half an hour later after stealing goods valued at 4,750 pesetas[74].

But according to Juana Navas, contrary to the news accounts, it was more common for a family not to hire someone if they did not have references. Additionally, she mentions how on certain occasions the mistress would set a trap to see if she could catch her staff stealing something:

> I've always had dirty hands but from working, never from doing things I shouldn't, that's for sure. But they often set traps for you to see if you succumb to temptation or not, like tossing things under the bed to see if you clean properly, even jewelry. They've done that many times just to check…[75]

The same happened to a domestic worker in Madrid who, when asked by JOC activists about her relationship with the members of the families where she had worked, commented how:

> In the first house where I was, every time they went out, I had to go out too, they wouldn't leave me alone in the house and I also didn't have a key to enter. When I was cleaning the mistress's room, she would sit there and wouldn't leave until I was done.[76]

Therefore, petty theft by domestic workers can be understood as breaches of labor discipline, both in their meaning and their implications. First, concerning the meaning, we see how sometimes they were justified through moral interpretations that clashed with the harsh realities of wage labor. The act of theft itself could signify that the workers did not accept the labor relationship, particularly in terms of wages. However, what

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seems clearer is that domestic workers were not willing to go unpaid for what they considered agreed-upon labor. In January 1964, after a heated argument with her employer, Petra decided to quit. However, her employer refused to pay her wages owed, so she couldn't leave. A few days later, when everything seemed to have settled down and calmly returned to the household, Petra took a bundle of banknotes from a cupboard as payment for what was owed to her and she left[77].

Theft challenged the fundamental concept of exchanging money for labor. If workers could acquire money without fulfilling their duties, it undermined the very essence of the employer–employee relationship. Consequently, mistresses and employing families became deeply concerned about controlling such practices within their households, leading to the propagation of alarmist discourses aimed at intensifying coercion through surveillance.

Leaving work: marriage and changing households

Labor discipline extends even to the termination of the employment relationship. According to authors like Robert Miles, the leeway to leave work voluntarily is a crucial aspect of free labor[78]. However, in domestic service in Spain during the 1960s and 1970s, this generated disciplinary issues too. Since the workers were not covered by labor legislation, there were no legal mechanisms preventing them from leaving their jobs. Yet, in practice, many found themselves in situations where mistresses made it difficult or impossible for them to depart. Recurrent cases of domestic employees facing such obstacles are documented in the letters from the Elena Francis program. For instance, a 20-year-old servant urgently requested, "Please write to me as soon as possible, as I want to leave at the earliest opportunity. However, it will be very difficult for my mistress to accept, as I have tried to leave many times before, and they have never allowed me to."[79] Similarly, two friends employed in the same household requested that "we would rather you did not disclose our address or names because our mistress always listens to your broadcast. If she discovers that we are planning to leave, she will become upset and may prevent us from doing so."[80] Attempts to hinder a worker's departure even led to employers filing lawsuits in criminal courts, as evidenced by a case in 1961 where a Madrid domestic worker was acquitted. The judge ruled that the employer had falsely accused the defendant of theft because she refused to continue providing her services[81].

Nevertheless, even when leaving, workers devised autonomous responses that could provoke varying degrees of confrontation, depending on whether they fell within moral boundaries. Cases where maids left their jobs to get married did not usually lead to conflict because marriage was encouraged by state institutions. In contrast, departures where the goal was better working conditions often resulted in labor conflicts.

Marriage was one of the main aspirations for domestic workers seeking to leave their jobs. Many longed to move from serving in other people's homes to establishing their own households, a sentiment expressed in a letter to the Elena Francis show where the author lamented that she had been serving "since I was 15 years old and as you will understand, I want to leave this life and obey my husband's orders, in our home."[82] State policy supported the transition from domestic work to marriage through its mutual aid society. The organization provided a dowry to all affiliated domestic workers upon

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marriage. The dowry amounted to up to 6,000 pesetas for those who had contributed for 120 months, with an additional 3,000 pesetas for Catholics marrying for the first time, provided they were under the age of 35[83]. The sum was not insignificant. For those under 35, who had contributed for 120 months or more, and were Catholic first-time brides, the dowry represented 3 to 4 months' worth of salary. This policy reflected the National-Catholic State's interest in reducing employment among married women by encouraging the departure of young women from the workforce after marriage. *Nuestra Casa* magazine proudly announced in its March 1961 issue the delivery of marriage dowries to 102 affiliates who wed in January of the same year[84].

However, the experiences of domestic workers revealed that marriage was not always an effective route out of employment. Establishing lasting relationships proved challenging for many domestic employees because they were stigmatized by their profession, which marginalized them and limited their social interactions within their own community. Moreover, men often did not view them as suitable partners, particularly men who held positions that allowed them to avoid work entirely[85]. A poignant example comes from a girl in Barcelona who wrote in to Elena Francis, lamenting that "I met a boy who has always shown me some kindness since then (…) he hasn't said anything to his parents, but I am completely certain that they will object because he comes from a well-heeled family, whereas I am quite the opposite since my job, as it is vulgarly termed, is that of a servant girl."[86] Even when domestic workers managed to marry, it was often to men who lacked the financial means to support a family independently. The breadwinner model advocated during the Franco dictatorship faced significant practical limitations. Although the regime promoted measures for women to exit the workforce after marriage, economic realities and low wages compelled most working-class women to continue working[87]. Many domestic workers, even after marriage, found themselves compelled to work as live-out maids, a reality witnessed firsthand by Juana Navas and echoed by many of her colleagues:

> What the girls really wanted was to meet someone they liked, someone appealing to them so they could get married and leave this behind… it was a way out… but then later on everyone was very mistaken –all of us, myself included– because you left, you had your little house, you had your freedom, but in the end, you had to go back to working in the same field, but not as a live-in anymore.[88]

If marriage did not provide an escape, workers often opted to change households in pursuit of better working conditions. Juana Navas noted that it was common for her to experience worsening treatment or increased workload after spending some time in a household where trust had developed. Her response was always the same: she left[89]. According to the study by Vázquez, 64 percent of workers surveyed had changed households between one and four times despite their relative youth. The main reasons cited were to earn more (23 percent) or due to dissatisfaction (19 percent)[90]. Instances of domestic workers seeking to change their jobs to improve their working conditions were widespread in Madrid and Barcelona. For example, a woman from Barcelona wrote to the Elena Francis radio show seeking a less demanding job, stating that "I have to serve and work a lot, and I would appreciate it if you knew of any suitable work

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for me. It would be better to work for a couple with less demanding tasks, as the current workload with three children is overwhelming."[91] In this way, leaving became a negotiating tool in the hands of domestic workers who, individually, could exert pressure and influence the construction of collective labor discipline. Its nature as a class pressure element is corroborated by the reaction it generated.

Articles in newspapers like ABC frequently highlighted the perceived power dynamics among domestic servants, with titles such as "*Réquiem por el ex Servicio Español*" (*Requiem for the Former Spanish Service*), "*La Tatacracia*" (*The Nannyocracy*), or "*Coplas a la Muerte de las Chachas*" (*Verses on the Death of Maids*)[92]. The stories emphasized the crisis in domestic service, particularly the challenge of finding young women willing to work under traditional conditions, if at all. The newspaper accounts suggested that maids demanded high salaries and minimal household tasks. Moreover, there was an exaggerated tone regarding the ease with which domestic workers could change households on a whim. This notion was humorously depicted in the 1968 film "¡*Cómo Está el Servicio*!" (*How the Service Is!*), where domestic workers changed households for trivial reasons. While the articles were used to highlight a perceived imbalance in supply and demand in favor of workers during the 1960s and 1970s[93], they could only be reflecting the anxieties of employing families rather than actual shifts in the labor market. State and non-state data fail to support a decline in female employment in this sector. Indeed, recent studies like that by Eileen Boris suggest that narratives of the crisis in domestic service as a means of controlling domestic labor were common across different spatial and temporal contexts[94].

Additionally, Sección Femenina and the state mutual aid group spearheaded initiatives to deter domestic workers from seeking better conditions elsewhere. The mutual aid organization recognized and rewarded workers' loyalty by offering prizes for constancy, economically incentivizing those who had remained in the same household for extended periods. The awards varied from 1,000 pesetas for 5 years of service to 6,000 pesetas for 30 years[95]. Although the monetary value might seem modest, the group's 1965 annual report documented the distribution of over 50,000 such awards. This statistic suggests that more than 17.9 percent of affiliates had remained employed in the same household for at least 5 years[96].

The Sección Femenina's magazine serves as another illustration of these efforts. In it, there was constant comment about the significance of domestic service and the honor of serving. The discourse, championed since the 1950s, was more focused on molding domestic workers into productive contributors rather than on enhancing their living conditions[97]. For example, a worker wrote to the magazine expressing grievances about the excessive workload imposed by her employers. The response downplayed her concerns, asserting that her workload was not extraordinary and emphasizing that such tasks would increase her skill and make her a better maid[98].

In the June 1960 edition, a fictional narrative ran in the section "*Diario de una Muchacha de Servir*" (*Diary of a Servant Girl)*, created as a contrast to the ideal maid. This story depicted a worker who attempted to change households and lied out of fear of the mistress's reaction, leading to disastrous consequences for all involved[99]. Another highly regarded section of the magazine featured articles honoring the dedication of workers who had remained in the same household for many years. The magazine published up to nine such articles in just over 2 years, recounting tales like those of Rafaela

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Navarro or Basilia Martinez. Rafaela, a centenarian domestic worker, had served in the same family since 1881. Basilia worked for 50 years in the same household, supporting her employer in the two decades following her husband's wartime death, which had left her without income. The stories praised the workers' good physical appearance and excellent health, highlighting their commitment to "caring for the household as if it were their own," as well as their "loyalty," "competence," and "consistent fulfilment of their duties."[100] These were the virtues intended to be instilled in other domestic workers[101].

Thus, while exiting the domestic work sphere through marriage or changing households can be both considered as autonomous practices from below, only the latter can be defined as a resistance. Leaving domestic service by marriage did not reject labor discipline. Hence, it did not provoke confrontations between employers and employees, and was promoted by the government. But leaving a household in search of better working conditions confronted a labor discipline defined by coercive paternalistic methods that prevented the abandonment of the employment relationship.

Conclusions

This paper broadens the historiographical focus on coercion in work in an informal, precarious, and feminized sector. Maids were mostly young migrants from low-income families with a lack of options due to poor formal education, which shows that working as a domestic worker was a determined decision that can hardly be described as totally free. Moreover, as some scholars have suggested, the fact that domestic workers entered the profession from unstable circumstances could increase the level of coercion.

Furthermore, the paternalistic relationship generated in households and the measures to prevent domestic workers from leaving their jobs intensified conditions. The fact that labor discipline was largely constructed through relationships based on the assumption that the worker was considered a member of the family served to increase scrutiny Paternalistic labor discipline based largely on nonmonetary incentives—linked by the likes of van der Linden to forms of soft coercion such as commitment, pride, or loyalty—served to reduce the wage costs of domestic workers' labor and to increase their attachment to the household they served. The paternalism was especially harsh due to a patriarchal and National Catholic setting where women were legally, morally, and culturally constricted by labor and family relationships. In this context, the commodification of labor power that took place on the entry to work could be expanded to full control over domestic workers' bodies and lives. In addition, while leaving a household did not have legal implications comparable to Müge Özbek's study of early 20th century Istanbul, it was not coercion free. Spanish mistresses developed affective and paternalistic practices to avoid losing their staff.

However, domestic workers were not simply victims of external forms of exploitation; they developed autonomous responses aimed at increasing their agency. If resistance is crucial here, it is not only as another example of the existence of everyday forms of resistance but also because it shows how labor discipline is also based on coercion limits. That is why the historical making of labor discipline in domestic service and its levels of coercion can only be understood by analyzing the available spaces for maids' disobedience. Resistance is used as an indicator of power and coercion levels.

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