4 Building trust by assembling signs of trustworthiness in illegalised exchanges

The case of the illegalised house-cleaning market in Geneva

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4.1 Introduction

Illegalised markets[1] have received little attention from economic sociologists (Aspers 2011; Beckert and Dewey 2017), yet illegality poses challenging questions for the sociology of markets, notably how actors of the supply and demand sides cooperate despite the non-enforceability of contracts by the state (Beckert and Wehinger 2013). Thus, trust must be established differently. Based on a qualitative sociological study of the illegalised house-cleaning market in Geneva, Switzerland, this chapter aims to contribute to the study of illegalised markets from an economic sociology perspective. I draw on 29 interviews with domestic workers, employers and institutional actors, and analyse how exchange partners manage to cooperate.

My argument is that in this market, building trust is a relational process that may be divided into three stages: the establishment of first contact, the face-to-face meeting and the service provision itself. Throughout this process, actors on both sides gradually build trust by assembling signs of trustworthiness. In doing so, they reassure themselves, which in turn produces trust and facilitates cooperation. Thus, cooperation might commence even though exchange partners do not fully trust each other. I show that distrust might be reduced over time, but can also reappear. Trust can be broken altogether when one exchange partner feels that the "moral contract" (Näre 2011) has been broken due to specific events (e.g. unpaid wages, suspicion of theft).

This study presents a case in which market actors barely know each other and the (potential) use of physical violence to regulate exchange is rare; it thus lacks two important alternative sources of regulation in illegalised economic exchange. Moreover, whereas studies usually focus on one category of actor in the market (the supply or the demand side), my research considers both sides of the exchange relationship. Among other things, this enables one to consider the asymmetrical power relations present in cooperation. By conceptualising the building of trust as a relational process, rooted in

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asymmetrical power relations and a moral contract, this chapter provides a richer understanding of cooperation in illegalised markets. It also provides greater detail about how solutions to the problem of cooperation are processed in practice.

The chapter is structured as follows. After introducing the issue of cooperation and trust in economic sociology, I turn to a discussion of trust in illegalised markets and in paid domestic work. I then present my conceptual framework, research question and methodology. Subsequently, my results are divided into three sections: the asymmetries and power inequalities between employers and employees; the establishment of first contact and the face-to-face meeting; and the service provision itself. Based on these findings, the next section details my argument concerning cooperation and trust in this illegalised market before concluding with some final observations.

4.2 Trust, cooperation and economic sociology

According to Aspers (2011, 17), a market is a "social structure for the exchange of rights in which offers are evaluated and priced, and compete with one another". He argues that markets need order to function, which stems from knowing clearly what is traded, as well as from the existence of rules and an economic value attached to the goods traded. Achieving order enables reducing uncertainty, thus allowing economic exchanges. Similarly, Beckert (2009) argues that markets need order to function but suggest distinguishing three coordination problems: the problem of value; the problem of competition; and the problem of cooperation. The cooperation problem – which is at the centre of this chapter – is linked to the fact that, when engaging in a transaction, actors do not know for certain whether the exchange partner is honest or reliable, or whether the goods or services exchanged have the proclaimed quality.

This problem, along with the two others, thus implies uncertainty that must be reduced so actors can build stable expectations and thus engage in economic exchange. However, as Beckert (2005) and Le Velly (2012) argue, uncertainty can be reduced but not completely eradicated, which highlights the importance of trust. Trust can be defined as "a tranquilliser that enables actors to accept an incalculable uncertainty in exchange relationships" (Beckert 2005, 6). Where does trust come from? If exchange partners cannot know for certain the trustworthiness of one another, or the quality of the goods purchased, under which conditions do they accept to cooperate?

Several sociologists have discussed trust and its production. A first argument lies in the social embeddedness approach developed by Granovetter (1985).[2] According to him, trust production is to be found within social relations and networks. When people know each other and have durable relationships, they tend to trust each other, even though uncertainty cannot be eliminated. Social networks can also facilitate the circulation of reputation, which helps to produce trust between actors. In contrast to Granovetter's

argument, which stresses the role of social relations, other researchers have highlighted alternative sources of trust.

Some have emphasised the role of political and legal institutions. For instance, in legal markets, the state plays a key role in stabilising exchanges. It notably establishes and enforces rules of exchanges, aiming to regulate how exchanges must be carried out (Fligstein 2001). By enforcing contracts, the state also facilitates the cooperation process because actors know they can resort to it in case of problems (Beckert and Wehinger 2013). Likewise, based on a comparative study of 28 EU member states, Nessel (2021) shows that differences in legal rules and political institutions across countries impact the level of consumer trust within those countries and lead to significant differences. On another level, some sociologists have highlighted the role of material devices – such as rankings, logos, labels, appellations and guidebooks – in producing trust in market exchanges (Karpik 1996; Le Velly 2012). These alternative approaches are fundamental, notably to understand how exchanges are possible when people do not know and trust each other beforehand.

These perspectives draw our attention to the social, political or material embeddedness that may act as a context facilitating the establishment of trust. However, they do not fully acknowledge the role of social interactions in producing trust. A few authors argue that trust may be elicited throughout the interaction itself, as actors act and interpret each other's actions (Beckert 2005; Chantelat and Vignal 2002; Le Velly 2012). Beckert (2005) advocates for a performative approach to the production of trust. He argues that trust can be produced as the interaction unfolds through performative acts of self-presentation[3] that actors – the trust-takers in his approach – display to give an impression of trustworthiness. Those acts thus function as signals whose purpose is to produce a willingness to cooperate. Beckert (2005) adds that acknowledging this does not mean that other sources of trust – such as social networks, norms or institutions – are not relevant. However, as Chantelat and Vignal (2002) demonstrate, producing trust through acts during the interaction requires competences to maintain the impression of trustworthiness and avoid acts that might break trust.

In sum, all these perspectives focus on explaining the sources of trust, highlighting the role of context (social, political, cultural or material) or interaction. Of course, economic exchange may rely on different sources of trust. In that sense, combining approaches may be fruitful. What happens, then, when exchanges occur under conditions of illegality, thus lacking an important source of regulation?

4.3 The production of trust in illegalised markets

Illegalised markets are those where economic exchanges violate one or several legal norms (Beckert and Dewey 2017). As a result of this law-breaking, market actors cannot rely on the state to stabilise their exchange, in contrast to legal markets, where it plays an important role in enforcing rules and

contracts and thus in building trust (Beckert and Wehinger 2013; Gambetta 2009). Likewise, Portes (2010, 136) argues that "the absence of regulation in informal economic exchange opens the door for violations of normative expectations and widespread fraud". Therefore, in illegalised markets, actors must find other ways to build trust, or at least to compensate for the lack of institutionally based trustworthiness. In other words, they must find other solutions to resolve the problem of cooperation in illegalised markets (Beckert and Wehinger 2013).

Whereas some authors argue that the (threat of) violence may prevent market actors from cheating (Gambetta 2009; Smart 1985; Steiner 2017), others suggest that market actors rely even more on social embeddedness, in line with Granovetter's (1985) argument. For instance, Sandberg (2012) and Nouguez (2003) show that illegalised drug markets rely heavily on friendship ties to create trust. Simultaneously, social ties may ensure cooperation via fear of humiliation (Hart 2008), or of exclusion from social networks (Portes 2010), thus highlighting the role of informal social sanctions and "enforceable trust" (Portes 2010).

Alternatively, some authors have investigated the role of categorisation in cases where market actors do not know each other well. For instance, Gambetta (2009) argues that the identification of signs and signals produced by potential exchange partners, willingly or not, is crucial. Similarly, Portilla (2019) shows that practical categorisation based on previous experiences within a market can enable workers to differentiate between trustworthy and untrustworthy employers. In that sense, cooperation may also rely on the impression of trustworthiness, rather than social embeddedness (Granovetter 1985) or threat (Gambetta 2009; Smart 1985; Steiner 2017). The impression of trustworthiness may stem from acts or appearances, as Beckert (2005) suggests, but also from competences (Chantelat and Vignal 2002), and thus experience.

Studies of illegalised economic exchanges thus show that, due to illegality, cooperation is tinged with distrust to a greater level than in legal markets; this must be reduced by relying on other sources of trust. These other sources of trust then become even more important. Before turning to research questions and results, we must consider the particularities of the issue of trust in paid domestic work.

4.4 The issue of trust in paid domestic work

Over the past few decades, several studies have noted the growing tendency for households in rich countries to hire migrant women from poorer countries to manage their domestic work (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Lutz 2010). Thus, an international division of reproductive labour and a transfer of care occur (Parreñas 2008; 2015), which some describe as another form of exploitation of poor women in a globalised world (Ehrenreich 2002). This international division of reproductive labour and transfer of care are also based on gender inequalities and contribute to the reproduction of these

inequalities (Lutz 2010). As a result of this process, people with asymmetrical social relations are brought closely together (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Kordasiewicz 2011) at the intersection of different forms of power relations, such as those based on class, gender and race (Rollins 1985) or citizenship (Anderson 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007).

The working relationships between employers and domestic workers are thus constructed in a way that places the latter in an unfavourable power relation (Anderson 2002). Accordingly, employers can impose precarious working conditions, and even degrading treatment, on employees, while emancipating themselves from their obligations as employers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Rollins 1985). Whenever the working conditions are considered "good", the situation is mainly the result of the generosity of the employers who offer such conditions or accept their domestic workers' demands. In other words, as Anderson (2002) notes, the employment situation ultimately depends on how the employer chooses to use their power over the worker.

Furthermore, paid domestic work is most often carried out illegally, outside of the formal regulations governing the sector, notably because people hiring domestic workers usually do not see themselves as employers with obligations towards their employees (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Rollins 1985). Besides issues of asymmetry and illegality, paid domestic work is also unique due to where the activity unfolds: inside the private sphere – the home of the employers – and in isolation (Ehrenreich 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Kordasiewicz 2015).

Due to these characteristics, the issue of trust in paid domestic work arises in a particular way. First, having a worker in the private sphere, unsupervised, presents a risk of theft of personal belongings (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007). Second, the absence of other employers or workers lessens the potential for social control (Rollins 1985). Third, given the asymmetric relationship and potential for abuse of power, one can assume that breaches of agreements, precarious working conditions, control, submission and degrading treatment are frequent in paid domestic work.

4.5 Conceptual framework and research question

This chapter addresses the problem of cooperation and trust issues between market actors within the illegalised house-cleaning market in Geneva. I follow Beckert and Dewey's (2017) definition of illegalised markets – those where economic exchanges violate one or several legal norms – as well as the idea of a problem of cooperation (Beckert 2009). The market under study is a job market whose illegality stems from the transgression of the formal regulations governing the domestic economy in Geneva. As a result, although reducing uncertainty is fundamental for the market to function (Aspers 2011), actors cannot rely on the state to enforce contracts (Beckert and Wehinger 2013). The research question I address in this chapter is: How do employers and domestic workers manage to cooperate in the illegalised house-cleaning

market in Geneva? Following Beckert (2005) and Le Velly (2012), I will consider that this process must be investigated through the interpretation carried out by market actors, rather than through a calculation process focusing on the costs and benefits. In doing so, I will analyse how market actors approach the problem of cooperation in illegality (Beckert and Wehinger 2013) and depict the different elements, such as context or interaction, on which they rely to grant or withdraw trust. Finally, I consider how the issue of trust is linked to the specificities of paid domestic work (private sphere, lack of social control and asymmetric relationships).

4.6 Methodology

This study is qualitative and based on semi-structured interviews carried out with domestic workers, employers and institutional actors. Domestic workers and employers were recruited through the use of intermediaries (except for three employers who I already knew personally). In some cases, these intermediaries were people in my circle of acquaintances who, following a discussion or seeing an advertisement for an interview I posted on social networks, offered to put me in touch with an informant they knew (e.g. a friend or family member). I also obtained contacts through associations that help migrants. Finally, several informants were recruited through a snowball effect, thanks to previous interviewees who agreed to put me in touch with others they knew: friends, family members, colleagues or even their employees (some of the domestic workers I interviewed were introduced to me by their employers). These intermediaries seemed to play a central role in establishing the trust that made the interviews possible.[4]

Overall, 11 interviews with domestic workers and 12 interviews with employers were conducted. Interviews with the domestic workers took place in cafés, on university premises, via video conference and, for one person, in her home. They were migrants from Latin America (Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Paraguay), the Philippines and Portugal. Five of the domestic workers did not have legal resident status at the time of the interview, and four others were former irregular migrants. Only around half of the interviews were recorded; I felt in a few cases that the workers were too uneasy or afraid about being recorded. Except for two interviews in cafés, the interviews with the employers were mainly carried out in their homes, at the suggestion of the interviewees. Almost all were recorded. The majority were still professionally active, working in research, teaching (university or secondary schools) or in the arts sector. A minority were retired. They lived in flats or houses, in most cases with their partner and children. In all interviews with domestic workers and employers, the questions asked were about how they first met each other, their working conditions and their working relationships.

In addition to the interviews with domestic workers and employers, I met six representatives of Geneva's institutions (the state, union and associations) who were key institutional actors concerning the domestic economy

in Geneva. The state, union and associative actors were contacted by letter and email and via a snowball effect. The interviews took place at their offices, except for one that was conducted at the university. Hearing their perspective on this market allowed for a better understanding of the institutional context and the various issues related to illegality in this economy. Additionally, the analysis draws on various documents, such as official communications, scientific reports and legal documents, many of which were provided to me by the actors I met.

All interviews were transcribed, anonymised and analysed using TAMS Analyzer software. For the analysis, a qualitative approach aiming to understand the actors' meaning was adopted. I followed the principles of the inductive grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss 2017), gradually creating a system of codes and analytical categories as I read the transcripts and became familiar with the data. However, I started early in the analytical process to confront my ideas about the literature on cooperation, trust, economic sociology and illegalised markets. The analytical process was thus conducted while confronting empirical data and the literature (Schmidt 2004). This led to analysing both elements of mistrust due to or aggravated by illegality – that is, the problem of cooperation – and various acts aiming to cope with uncertainty. The conceptual framework was thus constructed in parallel to the data analysis.

4.7 Asymmetries and power inequalities

Before moving to the issue of trust-building, the issue of power asymmetries between employers and domestic workers must be considered. Power asymmetries have their roots in three interconnected dimensions. The first refers to economic resources. After arriving in Switzerland, migrants urgently need a job. Moreover, because the domestic economy mostly comprises part-time jobs, they usually must find several employers to have a sufficient income. This issue is all the more difficult for some because employers' needs might change over time and working hours might be reduced or even cut off. Therefore, the workers explained to me that they very often had to accept jobs even with bad working conditions, such as low wages or poor treatment, given their pressing need to secure enough hours of work. Furthermore, challenging their employers would be risky, since this would possibly mean losing the job in a context with no contract or job security.

In addition to this economic dimension, some are also in a precarious legal situation. Considering that some workers are irregularised migrants, it would be difficult for them to negotiate the working conditions offered by employers, whether at the face-to-face meeting or once the working relationship has begun. Besides not having job security like workers with legal residency status, irregularised migrants feel that, should an issue arise, complaining about an employer's abuse of power is not an option – due to the fear of being arrested and deported. In other words, the fear of not

having enough working hours, in a more or less precarious economic (or even legal) situation, is critical when it comes to accepting job offers and working conditions. Another dimension relates to gender. When potential employers are men, some women fear that meeting them would mean risking gender-based violence. A final important factor concerns language ability. Especially at the beginning of their career in Geneva, domestic workers have a considerably poorer command than their employers of French, the language in which key matters such as working conditions are discussed.

All these elements highlight the asymmetrical power relations between domestic workers and their employers. Although domestic workers do have agency and develop resources over time, one must note that these asymmetries penetrate all aspects of the market, from the first contact and face-to-face meeting to the service provision itself. This also has significant implications for the issue of trust-building. The next section deals with the first two stages of the trust-building process: the establishment of first contact and the face-to-face meeting.

4.8 First contact and face-to-face meeting

Before starting a working relationship, domestic workers and employers must be able to establish contact, be willing to commence cooperation and agree on the working conditions. To that end, we need first to consider two different means of initial contact. The first is recommendation and word of mouth. These rely on the action of a third party who, having hired a domestic worker, recommends her to one or more of their acquaintances (friends, family members, colleagues or neighbours). This third party thus plays a crucial "broker" or "intermediary" role in this market regarding how information about a service advertisement or request circulates. This circulation can have two different origins. First, it may come from the future employer who, wishing to hire a cleaner, inquires within their close circle about potentially available persons. In this case, the current employer talks to their domestic worker to see whether she would be interested in obtaining more working hours. Second, the flow of information may be initiated by a request from the domestic worker to her current employer, in the hope that they might recommend her to other people to acquire more working hours. In other words, as Rollins (1985) noted, workers mobilise their employer's networks to find new jobs. Notably, some employers, when they particularly like their domestic workers, are proactive in helping them to find more work. Where mutual interest exists, the employer usually also passes on phone numbers, allowing the worker and the future employer to contact each other to arrange a meeting. However, this process sometimes involves another person. This is typically the case when the domestic worker, when she does not have enough time available and therefore cannot accept another job, passes the information on to a close friend who is also a domestic worker. Then, if the friend is interested, she gives the friend's contact details to her employer, who passes

them on to the future employer. In doing so, the domestic worker at the centre of the process becomes a "broker" in this market. This second modality is thus based on a sense of solidarity between domestic workers.

As such, the action of a third party plays a crucial role. First, it facilitates the circulation of information and the exchange of phone numbers. The third party's position thus resembles a structural hole (Burt 1992), except that they use their advantage to help the other actors by passing on information to which they would not otherwise have access. Second, and more importantly, the action of a third party plays a key role in terms of trust-building (Granovetter 1995). The recommendation made by the employer facilitates the establishment of an economic relationship between two people who did not know each other beforehand by reassuring them. For instance, this was described by Beatrice, a domestic worker who obtained several new employers this way:

> I think this [recommendation] is the best thing. It's the best thing because it's like a guarantee, like a certificate that they give to people. So I find it very effective.
>
> (Beatrice, domestic worker)

In the interviews I conducted, recommendations were acknowledged by both employers and domestic workers as the main advantage of this process and the main reason that they preferred to use it instead of other means. For employers and domestic workers alike, recommendations represent a form of "guarantee", in the words of Beatrice. Although this does not ensure that they will get along or the working relationship will be successful, the social ties (Granovetter 1995) facilitate the production of trust before any economic exchange. This highlights that this market relies heavily on social embeddedness, in the same vein as what Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007) describes. As Rollins (1985) also notes, mobilising the employer's networks gives workers a greater feeling of security regarding starting new jobs.

The advantage of recommendations is even clearer when compared with the other means used by some employers and domestic workers to meet each other, particularly advertisements in public spaces. In contrast to recommendations and word of mouth, advertisements do not rely on an "intermediary" or "broker". This usually means that the domestic worker must advertise their service in a public space where anyone can see. This can be done by placing advertisements with a contact phone number in local newspapers or on advertising boards at supermarkets. Potential employers call the phone number, after which a brief discussion takes place to arrange a meeting at the employer's home.

For some workers, this discussion is a crucial chance to assess employers and differentiate those who are willing to hire someone to clean from "impostors" – such as men who are only interested in sexual services and want to lure women into their homes. The latter can sometimes be identified

or "unmasked" by how they speak, their place of residence or the type of information they give about themselves, as this quote suggests:

> There are neighbourhoods [in Geneva], people won't call you, let's be honest … So, if you call me from this building in this neighbourhood [poor neighbourhood in Geneva] to come to your place, I'm not going. It's a bit stereotypical, but it was the only protection I had because I wasn't going to expose myself when I didn't know Geneva yet … You can see it [the impostors] in the way they speak. I could see it in the way people talk to me. You know, people with high incomes and from higher socio-professional categories have a slightly different way of talking … And the insistence too. Actually, when I was called and it was really an honest job offer, in general, it was, "Yes, I need [a cleaner], I'll give you my address". I mean, they give you the information straight away. The person makes you feel at ease because they give you information about them. Whereas with the others, it's a bit like, "Yes, so I've got some ironing to do, it's two hours a week, do you want it and all that".
>
> (Olivia, domestic worker)[5]

This worker highlights that this information is based on the mobilisation of stereotypes and particularly on categorisations of the "true" employer as belonging to a wealthy class. However, these categories are not considered absolute truths but rather strategies for reducing uncertainty. In cases of doubt, she pretends that her schedule is already full to refuse offers. Another strategy used by some is to avoid any offers that come from male inquirers.

However, despite the importance of social embeddedness in building trust (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007), my results suggest that social connections do not create a "transfer" of trust or "automatic" trust, but rather a foundation of trust that facilitates a face-to-face meeting. During the initial conversation over the phone, a meeting is scheduled for the next few days. It usually takes place at the future employer's home. Sometimes, a domestic worker will go to the meeting with a friend who is also a domestic worker. This is advantageous on two levels. First, it provides greater security against the risks of going to the home of a stranger whose intentions are unknown:

> You are always recommended to go in pairs … because we go to people's homes and we don't know who we might run into … because it gives a certain security.
>
> (Sandra, domestic worker)

Second, it offers support in terms of discussing the working conditions when, for instance, the worker applying for the job does not yet speak French very well, and is accompanied by someone with a better command of the language. Similarly, the face-to-face meeting allows employers to get a sense of

the person they may hire, an essential step before granting trust (even in cases in which workers have been recommended):

> So first, we spoke on the phone once, and then she came to the house … I needed to get a feel for the person, to know if it was ok if she stayed to be at my place while I was away, if I had the impression that she was someone I could trust. And then I wanted to show her the flat so that she could feel if it was okay. And also discuss the conditions, know what rate she was asking for, and whether she had already worked … to know how she saw things, whether she was okay to use my products, for example. So yeah, it was mostly about getting a feel for her.
>
> (Lorie, employer)

Interestingly, the issue of legal status (whether domestic workers are irregularised migrants) did not seem to matter to employers concerning building trust. Rather, the extent to which workers gave a "good" impression seemed the most important factor. What makes a good impression remains unclear, though, and depends on the employer. This, in turn, implies that the workers must remain flexible during the interview. However, my results also suggest that power inequalities play a key role. Appearing docile and non-challenging as a domestic worker – which is related to the power asymmetries – seems to give employers confidence, who may otherwise feel threatened or reluctant to hire someone with clear demands. Notably, for this reason, domestic workers often see the face-to-face meeting as a discussion rather than a negotiation, contrary to employers. Moreover, in many cases – and particularly for irregularised domestic workers – working conditions that workers consider good result mainly from the generosity of the employer who offers these conditions or accepts their requests. This situation, although less extreme, is similar to the findings of Griffin (2011) in her study on irregularised domestic workers in South Africa.

4.9 The service provision

The process of trust-building – and hence cooperation – is also dependent on the service provision itself. Therefore, we need to consider what happens once the working relationship has begun. To analyse this, I draw on the concept of the "moral contract" (Näre 2011). Based on a study of domestic work in Naples, Italy, the author sets out to analyse the relationship between employers and workers in this economy via the concept of the moral contract. Drawing on approaches from moral economies, she defines it as follows:

> [W]hen household becomes a locus of paid labour, a labour contract is accompanied by a moral contract. A moral contract is based on normative notions of good and bad, reciprocity, shared duties and responsibilities.

> The moral contract is always unwritten, implicit and under constant negotiation. Furthermore, moral contracts are always contextual and dependent on the intersections of gender, age, culture and language.
>
> (Näre 2011, 401)

Based on interviews with employers and domestic workers, the author explains that labour relations cannot be understood without considering moral norms regarding working relationships and working conditions. Moral norms can be seen in how employers recruit workers and define the characteristics of a "good" worker. These characteristics can vary from person to person. They may include being honest, not stealing, being clean, having a good work ethic, working without wasting time, not being lazy when the employer is not present to supervise, being able to adapt to the lifestyle and habits of the employer, being grateful and being altruistic (working as if it were their own home, even if this means working extra hours). In sum, these workers must demonstrate moral qualities – attributed to the characteristics of family relationships – that show that they are not concerned primarily with maximising economic profit. Näre (2011) argues that moral norms are also present in how domestic workers assess employers. For them, a "good" employer is essentially one who treats them with respect. Respectful treatment is thus seen as more important than other criteria, such as wages. For instance, if the workers do not feel respected, they may decide to leave the job. The author further explains that the best possible relationships are described by workers as those that make them feel like part of the family. Using the concept of the moral contract (Näre 2011) will hence be useful in explaining how the process of trust-building is also connected to the moral perception of how the other should be or act. I explore hereafter the issues of expectations towards work, expectations towards relationships and "moral misconduct".

My interviews reveal great diversity in the tasks handled by domestic workers. However, listing the tasks would not sufficiently capture the complexity of employers' expectations. We first must consider the appreciation of autonomy. Whether employers give clear instructions or prefer letting workers decide what to do, they usually value workers' ability to anticipate their needs. Additionally, employers often have implicit expectations about how the cleaning should be done (e.g. positive and energised attitude, prioritisation of tasks or work outfits) or how the working relationship should be (e.g. the right balance between professional distance and intimacy, conversations about personal matters over a coffee). To give an example, Gabrielle, an employer, told me about an appearance detail that was troubling her about her employee:

> The Portuguese woman used to arrive with her big boots with heels, and she cleaned the house with her big boots, you know. I said to myself,

> "Wait a minute, I don't wear heels when I'm cleaning, I don't wear my boots". I found that weird.
>
> (Gabrielle, employer)

Importantly, this appearance detail, together with other things, eventually led Gabrielle to dismiss her. The many examples from my interviewees suggest that meeting employers' expectations is a complicated task that requires both adaptation and flexibility on the part of domestic workers. To put it another way, as Parreñas (2015) explains, behind employers' positive attitudes towards domestic workers are demanding expectations. One of the challenges is to maintain a pleasant attitude and demonstrate pleasure in doing the work, even if it means suppressing genuine feelings and emotions (Parreñas 2015; Rollins 1985). This challenge is all the more important since the employer's satisfaction is key to ensuring that they will be willing to recommend the worker to their own acquaintances. As previously stressed, recommendations and word of mouth are workers' preferred means of attaining more working hours.

Over time, depending on how the working relationship plays out, trust evolves. It may be strengthened. For the workers, the fact that an employer lets them into their home or even gives them keys makes them feel that the employer trusts them and can thus be trusted in return. Furthermore, once they see that an employer has paid the first wage instalment, they come to believe that that employer is reliable. For employers, satisfaction with the cleaning service and the working relationship strengthens trust. Although I have thus far emphasised the expectations of employers regarding the relationship with their employees, reciprocity may also be welcomed by workers, in that it gives them social recognition (and also sometimes the feeling of being part of the family). However, trust may also collapse suddenly, such as when employers or workers do something that the other regards as moral misconduct. This category of actions, when noticed, is seen as unforgivable and may lead employers or workers to no longer believe in the trustworthiness of the other. For this reason, moral misconduct must be differentiated from issues of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction). For example, employers may be slightly unsatisfied or disappointed by an employee's work but still keep her because of the good relationship they have built over time. Similarly, workers may find a situation not ideal in terms of working conditions but still keep the job, either because they need the hours or because they value the social relationship and reciprocity with the employer. Conversely, cases of moral misconduct seem to justify an immediate end to cooperation. In that sense, maintaining cooperation over time also implies not committing acts that, once detected, could be perceived as transgressing the moral contract, which would lead to feelings of betrayal.

From the point of view of domestic workers, moral misconduct may occur whenever employers demand things that were not part of the original agreement. For example, one interviewee told me about a negative experience

she had with a former employer. She was asked to clean the employer's shoes even though it was not part of their agreement, and not long after this she was asked to work on a day off. Annoyed by these requests, the worker refused and then decided not to return to the woman's home, believing that she could no longer trust her. Other moral misconduct includes cases in which promises of payment are not kept. When such promises accumulate without being honoured, trust may deteriorate and workers may decide to leave the employer. These examples show that non-compliance with previous commitments can be seen as instances of moral misconduct and lead workers – even if they are tolerant to a certain extent – to end the cooperation. From the employer's point of view, moral misconduct may occur when leaving someone unsupervised in their home, thus introducing the risk of theft. Some employers with whom I spoke recalled such events, in which they discovered that their employees had been stealing from them. Examples I was given included the theft of food, but not money or valuable items. Interestingly, the employers explained that the problem was not the value of the stolen goods, but rather the sheer betrayal of trust. In this case, the discovery of theft led to dismissal without notice and without honouring unpaid wages.

4.10 Assembling signs of trustworthiness: Strategies to reassure oneself

How do employers and workers manage to cooperate in the illegalised housecleaning market in Geneva? In the previous analysis, I broke down three stages that must be considered. In the first stage – the establishment of contact – the employers and workers are introduced to each other. At this stage, a recommendation from a person who both parties trust seems to play a key role. When contact is established without such a broker, paying attention to the information exchanged on the phone before the meeting is also an important way for domestic workers to identify impostors. This involves assessment of the way potential employers speak and their place of residence (highlighting the role of the presumed social class of the potential employer), as well as the content of the discussion. Based on these factors, some workers decide whether to grant trust. The second stage is the face-to-face meeting. On the part of the employers, conducting a job interview allows them to obtain a sense of the worker they are considering hiring. For the workers, one means of reassurance is to attend the interview accompanied by someone (e.g. a fellow domestic worker). In doing so, they feel safer when entering the home of someone whose intentions are unknown. This is also a way to increase their power over negotiations regarding working conditions (especially if they do not speak French). Finally, the third stage is the service provision itself. I have shown how trust can be strengthened or deteriorate over time. I have also argued that this process is linked to maintaining the moral contract, especially expectations surrounding the work and working relationship. Relatedly, I additionally explored the issue of moral misconduct.

What can we learn from this? To begin with, this analysis stresses the importance of context in facilitating cooperation, by showing a case where it does not provide sufficient trust. Political and legal institutions (Fligstein 2001; Nessel 2021) are not supposed to provide trust in illegalised economic exchanges. Material embeddedness does not facilitate cooperation either in this case, and might even create fear if we consider the location of economic exchanges – the private sphere – as a place where both actors are vulnerable. As for social embeddedness, even though it plays a positive role (with recommendations), it is not always present, and it does not appear to be sufficient in itself to ensure cooperation. Importantly, this suggests that cooperating here occurs with both participants feeling distrust.

On what elements is cooperation based, then? My analysis goes in the same direction as Beckert (2005)'s pragmatic approach. Beckert (2005) argues that the willingness to cooperate might be elicited by acts of self-presentation, creating an impression of trustworthiness. Those acts can thus be apprehended as signs of trustworthiness. Similarly, my results show that cooperation between employers and domestic workers relies on signs of trustworthiness. However, whereas Beckert focuses on the acts of the trust-taker to produce trust, my analysis highlights the importance of the perception and assessment of signs of trustworthiness (see also Gambetta 2008) on both sides of the exchange relationships. To put it another way, no clear divide exists between a trust-giver and a trust-taker here, and each party involved tries to find signs of trustworthiness during the social interaction (Beckert 2005), but also before interacting. Through the accumulation of such signs or by constating their relative absence – or, worse, signs suggesting risks – employers and workers assess whether they can trust each other. Recommendations, way of speaking, place of residence, discussion content, appearances, attitudes, handling of tasks, giving of keys, negotiation of relationships, payment, respect of agreement and theft are all elements that become signs allowing assessment of whether to grant or withdraw trust.

Looking for and assembling signs of trustworthiness thus allows exchange participants to reassure themselves and, in turn, to produce trust and facilitate cooperation. By this, I do not mean that acts of self-presentation (Beckert 2005) or signals produced willingly (Gambetta 2009) are not relevant. However, in my case study, cooperation seems to rely more on strategies aiming at reassuring oneself – on both sides – than strategies aimed at producing willingness to cooperate. At the very least, this suggests that we also need to consider such self-reassuring strategies when addressing the issue of cooperation in illegalised markets. Additionally, this suggests that trust-building is dependent on how signs (produced willingly or not) are interpreted by actors.

This study leads to the consideration that trust-building (or trust-breaking) is a relational process in the sense that it heavily relies on interaction – that is, in interpreting actions of the other in terms of signs and acting accordingly. It is also a gradual process. It begins before any in-person meeting,

and then cooperation might start even though exchange partners do not fully trust each other. Highlighting both the relational and temporal dimensions of trust-building thus provides a clearer understanding of how solutions to the problem of cooperation are processed in practice.

Over time, the results suggest that distrust might be reduced but can also reappear or break, especially when one exchange partner feels like the moral contract (Näre 2011) between them has been broken due to specific events (e.g. unpaid wages, theft). Furthermore, investigating distrust in this case draws attention to the asymmetric dimension of cooperation, as several studies on paid domestic work have already shown (Anderson 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Rollins 1985). From the fear of going alone to the meeting to the pressure to meet expectations (regarding work, relationships or attitude), my results suggest that domestic workers feel distrust more acutely compared with their employers. This is because they have less power – at the intersection of economic position, gender, origin and sometimes legal status – and are often dependent on employers to find more working hours.

The study also reveals that the responsibility for building trust lies heavily with the actors who are involved in the economic exchange. They must produce, using various strategies, an acceptable level of order (Aspers 2011) to enable the economic exchange. This particular point sets this case study apart from most research that focuses on illegalised transactions since, in contrast to them, the state's absence is not compensated for here by another social organisation such as the mafia (Gambetta 2009) or informal moral sanctions within a community (Hart 2008; Smart 1985). This might have to do with the specificity of house cleaning, which takes place within private homes, in a decentralised manner, hindering collectivisation. Another possible reason is that paid domestic work in Switzerland is very often carried out by irregularised women migrants, a population with limited resources to make demands or enforce informal rules in economic exchanges.

Lastly, the economic exchange is not regulated explicitly by physical violence (Gambetta 2009; Smart 1985; Steiner 2017), even if fear exists in some cases. One possible explanation is that employers and employees, although unequal in power, are ultimately both vulnerable to each other once the working relationship has begun. Saying that physical violence does not regulate economic exchange, however, does not mean that certain actions may not be experienced violently (e.g. actions such as dismissals or thefts).

4.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed how employers and domestic workers manage to cooperate in the illegalised house-cleaning market in Geneva. Based on semi-structured interviews conducted with domestic workers, employers and institutional actors, I argued that cooperation relies on a three-stage process through which both market actors look for and gather signs of trustworthiness. In doing so, they reassure themselves, which in turn produces trust and

facilitates cooperation. I also showed that building trust can be understood as a relational process, rooted in a moral contract as well as in asymmetrical power relations. In other words, this chapter highlighted both the asymmetric and moral dimensions of trust-building.

This study thus gives new insights into the understanding of illegalised markets from the perspective of economic sociology. First, it shows that, when context cannot provide enough trust, the responsibility for building trust lies heavily with the actors who are involved in the economic exchange. I argued that this is achieved through signs of trustworthiness, which are identified and interpreted before and during the interaction. Therefore, future studies need to further analyse this reliance on interaction, as well as potential conflicting signs or discrepancies between actors' intentions. More studies are needed to explore issues of cooperation in illegalised markets, especially those in which trust is not based on strong ties, violence or informal social organisation.

Notes

1 Following Beckert and Dewey (2017), I prefer the term "illegal markets" to "informal markets". However, I will use the term "illegalised" to stress, as Dewey (2016) suggests, that the category "illegal" is a product of the state.
2 More recently, Granovetter (2017) distinguished five different sources of trust: (1) trust based on knowledge or calculation of interests of the other; (2) trust based on personal relationships (which refers to what he calls "relational embeddedness"); (3) trust based on membership in groups and networks (which refers to "structural embeddedness"); (4) institutional sources of trust; and (5) trust based on norms. Expanding on his social embeddedness approach, Granovetter thus also highlighted the role of knowledge, information, norms and institutions.
3 Beckert (2005) distinguishes four strategies of self-presentation in market relations: (1) commitment; (2) congruence of expectation; (3) competence; and (4) integrity.
4 While this approach was successful in some cases with domestic workers, it should be mentioned that on several occasions it did not lead to an interview, either because I never received a reply or because they did not have enough time to arrange a meeting. Distrust, especially because some of them were irregularised migrants, certainly played a role in that regard, but another reason was a lack of time. Even among the domestic workers who agreed to meet with me, it was sometimes difficult for them to find the time for an interview, given their busy professional lives, their private lives (including, for some of them, caring for their children) and the French classes that a few were taking.
5 Olivia is actually the daughter of the domestic worker I met. Because her mother did not speak French well and I did not speak Portuguese at all, she agreed to be present during the interview to help translate from Portuguese to French for her mother and I. Interestingly, Olivia usually also translates with employers and helps her mother find new employers. In this quotation, she explains to me her strategies when sorting out employers on the phone.

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